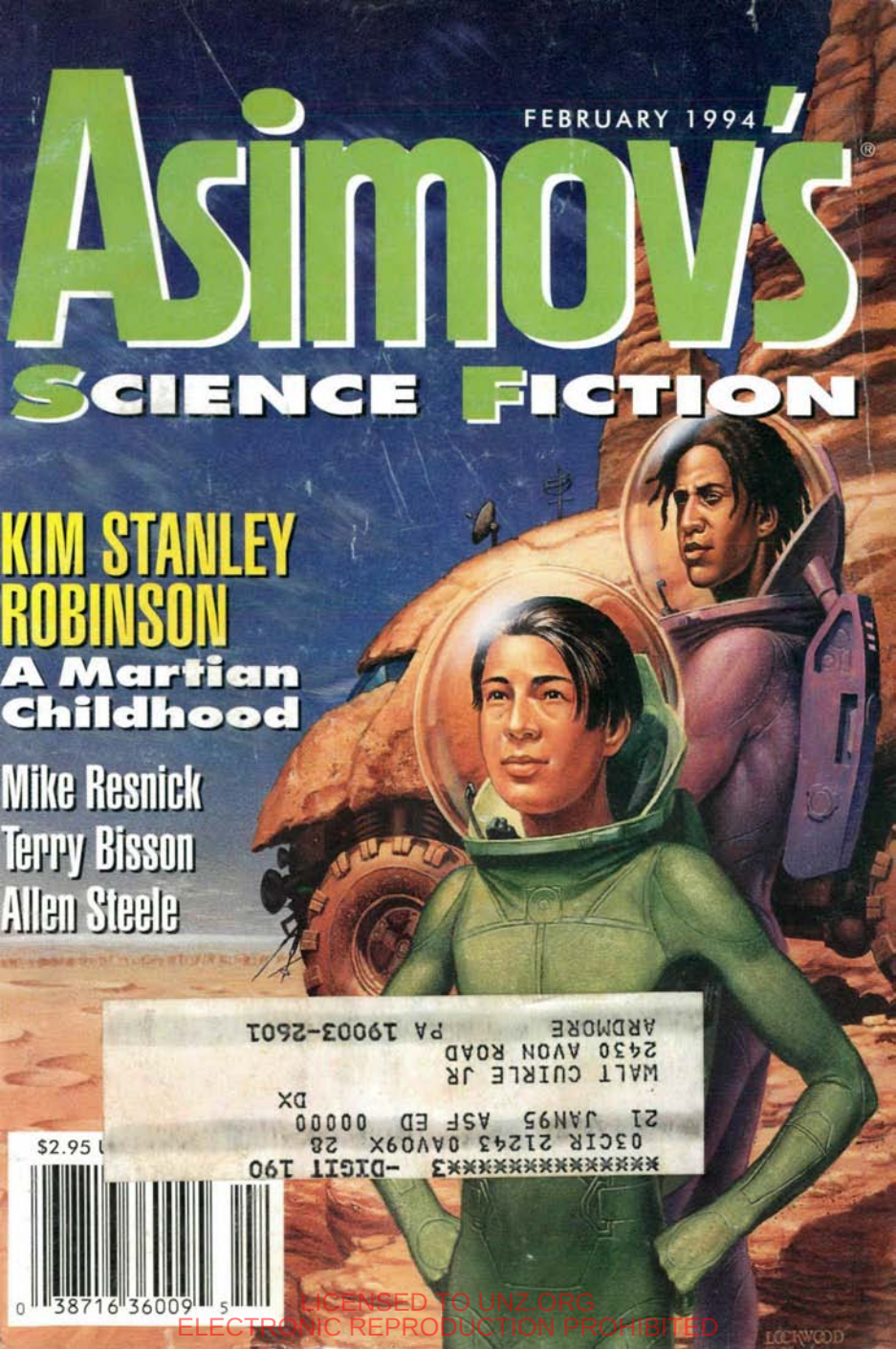
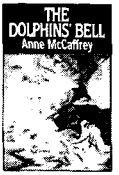

FEBRUARY 1994
Asimov's
SCIENCE FICTION
KIM STANLEY ROBINSON
A Martian Childhood
Mike Resnick
Terry Bisson
Allen Steele
$2.95
0 38716 36009 5
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED
LUCKWOOD

8607 $22.00/**$11.98**



8995 **$6.98x**

8268 $19.00/**$8.98**

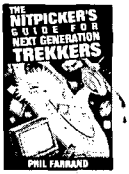
6585 $20.00/**$9.98**

8656 $22.00/**$10.98**

4994 **$7.98x**

2113* $27.95/**$14.98**

6536+ $22.00/**$10.98**



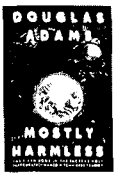
5819+ **$9.98x**

91180 $19.95/**$9.98**

8342* $25.00/**$11.98**

6445 **$10.98x**

8334 **$7.98x**

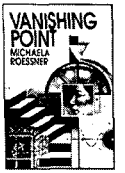


7302 $20.00/**$6.98**

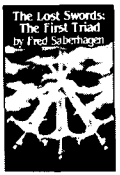
8276 $21.95/**$10.98**

6601 $22.95/**$11.98**

8367 $24.95/**$11.98**

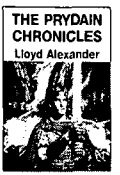


8284 $21.95/**$7.98**



7260 *Woundhealer's Story, Sightblinder's Story, Stonecutter's Story*
$45.85#/**$12.98**

5017 *Farslayer's Story, Coinspinner's Story, Mindsword's Story*
$50.85#/**$13.98**



5595 All 5 novels plus *The Foundling & Other Stories*
$83.70#/**$14.98**

4747 *So You Want to Be a Wizard, Deep Wizardry, High Wizardry*
$45.85#/**$12.98**

0752 *Elric of Melniboné, The Sailor on the Seas of Fate., The Weird of the White Wolf*
$9.98x

1172 *The Vanishing Tower, The Bane of the Black Sword, Stormbringer*
$10.98x

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN...

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. Once your membership's accepted, we'll send your 5 BOOKS. If you're dissatisfied with the books, return them within 10 days at our expense. Membership will be canceled; you'll owe nothing. **HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS.** Save as much as 65% off publishers' edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses. **THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE.** You'll receive up to 16 issues a year. Each reviews the Featured Book Selection(s) plus dozens of alternate books. **SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE.** To get the Featured Book Selection(s), do nothing—it will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling charge (and sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order. **AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION.** Take up to 2 years to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime. **RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES.** If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, simply return the book at our expense.

Prices in fine print are publishers' hardcover editions.
Prices in bold print are Club hardcover editions.
* Explicit scenes and/or language
x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members
Combined publishers' editions

+ Copyright © 1993 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. STAR TREK is a Registered Trademark of Paramount Pictures.
◊ Copyright © 1992 by DC Comics, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Published by arrangement with Warner Books, Inc./New York.
Cover photo courtesy of Warner Bros.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Son, it's time. Witch do you want for joining now?"

6213 $18.95/**$10.98** 7575 **$7.98x** 6916 **$12.98x**

7609* *The Book of the Damned, The Book of the Beast* $39.90#/**$10.98**

5264 *The Book of the Dead, The Book of the Mad* $39.90#/**$10.98**

8300 $24.95/**$12.98**

THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB®

MAIL TO: *The Science Fiction Book Club*
6550 East 30th Street, P.O. Box 6367
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6367

Please write book numbers here:

YES! Please enroll me in *The Science Fiction Book Club* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 5 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just $1, plus shipping and handling.

SAVE MORE—BUY YOUR FIRST BOOK NOW FOR $2.98
☐ Send me the book I've indicated and reduce my commitment to only 3 more books. Bill me an additional $2.98, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

48130 33

48131 31

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms. _____
(please print)

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If you're under 18, your parent must sign here: _____

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application. ASI 2/94

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stories from *Asimov's* have won twenty-two Hugos and twenty-one Nebula Awards, and our editors have recieved nine Hugo Awards for Best Editor. Asimov's was also the 1993 recipient of the Locus Award for Best Magazine.

Asimov's SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 18 No. 2 (Whole Number 212)
February 1994
Next Issue on Sale
February 1, 1994

Novella

128 A Martian Childhood — Kim Stanley Robinson

Novelettes

8 The Hole In the Hole — Terry Bisson
92 Laddie of the Lake — Kandis Elliot

Short Stories

42 Barnaby in Exile — Mike Resnick
56 No Refunds — Phyllis Eisenstein
74 Whinin' Boy Blues — Allen Steele
114 A Bag of Custard — Michael H. Payne

Departments

4 Guest Editorial: Spinning Wheels, Democracy, and the USS *Enterprise:* Why There Will Never Be a Science of History — Geoffrey A. Landis
176 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Cover art for "A Martian Childhood" by Todd Lockwood
Poems by Keith Allen Daniels, Sandra Lindow, and William John Watkins

Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director (1977–1992)
Gardner Dozois: Editor **Sheila Williams:** Managing Editor
Christoph Haas-Heye: President & Publisher **Terri Czeczko:** Art Director

Published every 28 days which includes special issues in April and November by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, at $2.95 per copy ($3.75 per copy in Canada). One year subscription $39.97 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $49.97. (GST included in Canada) payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, Box 5130, Harlan, IA 51593-5130. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Call 800-333-4108 with questions about your subscription. For back issues send $3.50 to Asimov's Science Fiction, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. Address for all editorial matters: Asimov's Science Fiction, 1540 Broadway, NY, NY 10036. Asimov's Science Fiction is the registered trademark of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines. © 1994 by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 260657. POSTMASTER, send change of address to Asimov's Science Fiction, Box 5130, Harlan, IA 51593-5130. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 1E9. ISSN 1055-2146. GST #R123293128

Printed in U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ISLANDS OF TOMORROW
by F. M. Busby

A fast-paced, exciting romp through a future dominated by time-travelers...who may or may not be facing the end of all humanity.

DRAGONSPAWN
by Mark Acres

The start of an exciting new fantasy adventure series from the author of *Runesword*.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S ROBOTS IN TIME: DICTATOR
by William F. Wu

This fourth episode of a popular series set in Asimov's robot universe finds our time-traveling heroes in the midst of World War II Germany.

LARQUE ON THE WING
by Nancy Springer

A moving, outrageously funny, thought-provoking, truly unique and weird fable for our times.

"The finest fantasy writer of this or any decade. Her fantastic images are telling, sharp and impressive; her poetic imagination unparalleled."

— Marion Zimmer Bradley

An AvoNova Book/William Morrow Hardcover

COMING IN FEBRUARY 1994

AVONOVA

AVON BOOKS
The Hearst Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GUEST EDITORIAL

SPINNING WHEELS, DEMOCRACY, AND THE USS *ENTERPRISE:* WHY THERE WILL NEVER BE A SCIENCE OF HISTORY

by Geoffrey A. Landis

Hari Seldon lied to you. Truth really is, as they say, stranger and more convoluted than fiction. History will never be a science, because the interactions of humanity, like a turbulent flow, are chaotic.* One thing leads to another, small causes have large effects, and the effects are not always predictable from the cause.

Consider, for an example, the effects on society of one simple invention: the spinning wheel. In the Middle Ages, cloth was made from hand-spun flax. Since hand spinning to make cloth is a slow and labor-intensive process, the product was necessarily an expensive item. Sometime in the mid-thirteenth century, however, the spinning wheel, invented in China, was introduced in Europe. The spinning wheel (and, later, the textile mill) made cloth common, and cheap.

Cheap cloth led to the existence of something new: rags. When cloth was expensive, there was no such thing as rags—clothes were repaired and used until they had none of the original material left.

Paper is a relatively new invention. Before paper, books were made from parchment. You make parchment from the skin of a lamb. First it is soaked in water and lime to remove the hair, then stretched and dried, and finally rubbed smooth (by hand) with pumice. Making a single vellum Bible in the Middle Ages required the skins of two to three hundred lambs. No wonder that books were rare and precious!

With the introduction of rag-stock, suddenly there was cheap and high-quality paper. Without cheap paper, there was little point in having a printing press: what point is there in mass-production

*In the technical sense of the word "chaos," a form of deterministic unpredictability.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of books if each one requires two hundred lambskins? But with the introduction of rag-stock paper, invention of the printing press swiftly followed.

Cheap paper led to literacy. Obviously, it was pointless to have a literate population when books were rare and expensive. And so, we can continue, the printing press led to newspapers (imagine! Going to all that trouble of printing up something that you *throw away tomorrow!*). But newspapers (and their earlier incarnation, broadsides), led to the possibility of democracy. Who could even have *thought* of having the "people" govern, when the only way to be well informed was to have an extensive retinue of advisors and courtiers? With books and newspapers, any common farmer could be informed at a level that once kings and scholars would have envied.

And thus, the necessary corollary of democracy: freedom of the press.

Another product of the spinning wheel was Mr. Scott. That's right, the crusty chief engineer on the old *Star Trek*.

Consider the rise of civilization in the north—and by "north," I mean north of Italy: Germany, Britain—when staying warm in the winter means wearing furs. But there is a limited amount of fur that local trappers and farmers can provide, not enough to sustain large populations and cities. The infant death rate was over 50 percent. It's no coincidence that early

GARDNER DOZOIS:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Executive Editor
IAN RANDAL STROCK:
Associate Editor
SCOTT L. TOWNER:
Associate Editor
JEAN TRAINA:
Design Director
TERRI CZECZKO:
Art Director
ANTHONY BARI:
Junior Designer
MARILYN ROBERTS:
Senior Production Manager
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Manager
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights
CONSTANCE SCARBOROUGH:
Contracts Manager
BARBARA PARROTT:
Director of Newsstand Circulation
BRUCE SCHWARTZ:
Director of Circulation Subscription Sales
LESLIE GUARNIERI:
Renewal and Billing Manager Subscription Sales
JUDY DORMAN:
Assistant Advertising Sales Manager

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
(1977-1992)

CHRISTOPH HAAS-HEYE:
President and Publisher
Dell Magazines

FRED SABLOFF:
Associate Publisher
Dell Magazines

JACK HOEFT
President and CEO
Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212)782-8532

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
Dresner Direct, Inc. N.Y., N.Y. (212) 889-1078

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" in the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *Asimov's*, Bantam Doubleday Dell Magaazines, 1540 Broadway, NY, NY 10036. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

civilizations—from Babylon right up through through Rome—were in the south.

Cheap cloth (along with effective fireplaces) changed all that. The resultant northern population explosion had an unexpected consequence: a virtually complete deforestation of Britain. All those people wanted to keep warm indoors, and cut down all the trees for firewood. That led to the immediate, and desperate, demand for an alternate fuel.

The answer was coal. By a stroke of good fortune, coal was plentiful in Britain. The shallow, easy-to-dig coal was quickly found and used up. The voracious demand for heating coal to warm a burgeoning population resulted in the digging of ever deeper coal mines, in northern Britain, Wales, and Scotland. But water runs downhill, and Britain has a wet climate. You have to keep pumping that water out of the mines! This is why the steam engine was invented and improved —not to make locomotives (which came around much later), but to run the pumps to keep coal mines dry. (Heck, the Greeks knew about the steam engine;* they just didn't need to pump coal mines dry, since their climate was moderately warm anyway.) Coal and steam, a perfect partnership: steam engines allow deep coal seams to be mined, and coal runs the steam engines. And, of course, once you have steam engines, next comes thermodynamics, and—bingo!—the whole industrial revolution falls in your lap: railroads and steamships, then automobiles and airplanes, finally atomic bombs and moon rockets.

—and *that,* the industrial revolution plus the printing press and cheap paper, led to *us*: the science fiction community—

It's almost frightening, really, on what a slender and improbable chain of events our civilization rests.

Not only did the spinning wheel give us democracy, it also gave us communism. The evils that incited Karl Marx's righteous indignation were the excesses of the industrial revolution: the ten-hour-plus work day in the textile mill, child labor . . . the same sorts of things graphically described by that contemporary chronicler of the industrial revolution, Charles Dickens. And, it is interesting to note, most of the things Marx advocated, such as public education, labor unions, and the eight-hour workday, have been implemented in all the industrialized nations. The fight against communism was over long ago: the communists won.

The industrial revolution gave us the world war, the first war in which chemical technology was a major player. The war demanded trucks and airplanes, and trucks and airplanes demanded rubber tires, so naturally the good guys —us—embargoed access to the Malaysian rubber plantations to the Germans. But the Germans, at the time, were the best chemists in the

*They used them for magic tricks, like opening up temple doors on cue, and such.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world. They learned to make synthetic rubber—latex—in a hurry.

Latex gave us another new invention, the cheap and reliable rubber condom. In one blow it removed the danger of venereal disease and pregnancy, and that led, in a generation or two, directly to the sexual revolution.*

The condom itself was quickly antiquated by the pill and penicillin. But *that* led to the spread of AIDS into the industrialized world. And, I think, not even Hari Seldon would be willing to guess where *that* will lead.

Oh, yes—Scotty? Well, recall the British coal mines in Scotland. Scotland, of course, is where they had to have the steam engineers, to make and improve and keep the steam engines running. And so for centuries the best engineers *were* Scotsmen. Thus, the legend of the Scottish engineer persisted until it solidified into a stereotype. And so, for the super-engineer of the Federation's greatest starship, who else could possibly do but an intrepid Scotsman?

From the spinning wheel to the sexual revolution and the U.S.S. *Enterprise:* our technology has changed our lives in ways that we never would have predicted, changed our culture and our governments, and in a very real sense made us into what we are. Quite a twisted trail.

If it were science fiction, I'm not sure I'd believe it.●

Hugo- and Nebula-Award-winning author Geoffrey A. Landis is a physicist at the NASA Lewis Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Landis is also the winner of Analog *magazine's 1993 Anlab award for his fact article, "The Demon Under Hawaii" (July 1992).*

*Robert Heinlein makes an interesting argument, in *Expanded Universe,* that the cause of the sexual revolution was the Model T Ford. With the advent of cheap cars, young couples could do their courting away from the eyes of mom and dad. But I think that the latex condom had a lot more to do with it: when sex has a distinct probability of leading to pregnancy, there's a good reason for a strict moral code restricting sex to married couples.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING:

Psychohistory: Michael F. Flynn, "An Introduction to Psychohistory," *Analog,* April 1988, May 1988; Isaac Asimov, "Psychohistory," *Asimov's Science Fiction,* July 1988.

From spinning wheels to the Gutenberg Bible: Lynn White, Jr., "Technology Assessment from the Stance of a Medieval Historian," *American History Review,* Vol. 79, Feb. 1974, 1–11.

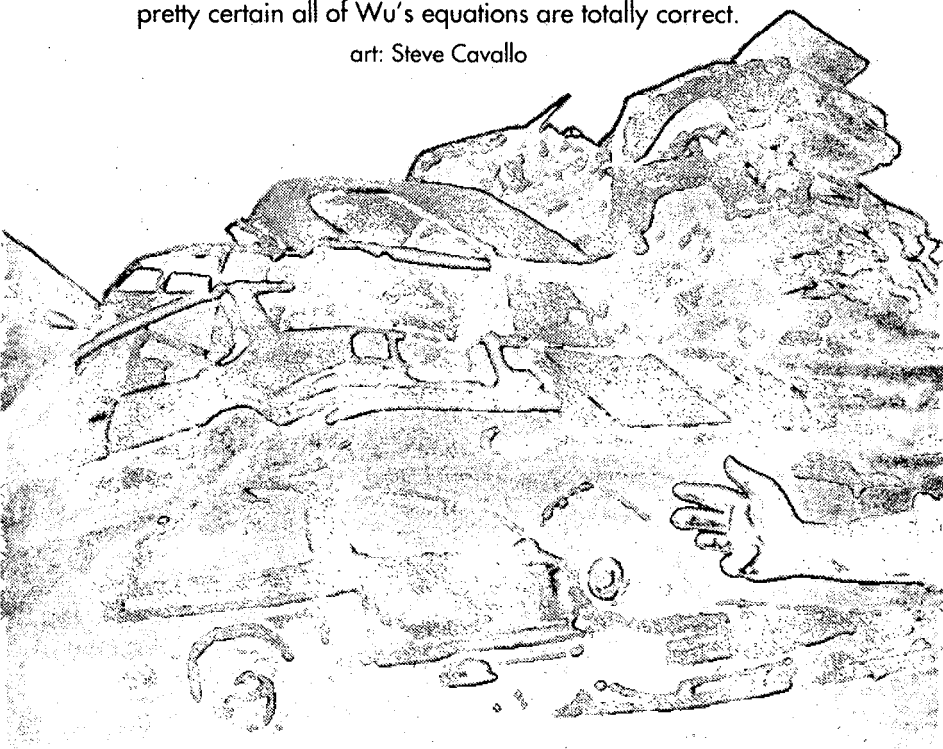
The deforestation of Britain: J.U. Nef, "An Early Energy Crisis and Its Consequences," *Scientific American,* Nov. 1977, pp. 140–151.

The Scottish engineer: Jerry Pournelle, *A Step Further Out,* Ace, 1979.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Hole In the Hole" will introduce readers to Wilson Wu—one of SF's most charming characters. Terry Bisson tells us he hopes to chronicle more of Mr. Wu's amazing adventures. He also informs us that, since he himself has had some undergraduate math, he's pretty certain all of Wu's equations are totally correct.

art: Steve Cavallo



THE HOLE IN THE HOLE

Terry Bisson

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One

Trying to find Volvo parts can be a pain, particularly if you are a cheapskate, like me. I needed the hardware that keeps the brake pads from squealing, but I kept letting it go, knowing it wouldn't be easy to find. The brakes worked okay; good enough for Brooklyn. And I was pretty busy, anyway, being in the middle of a divorce, the most difficult I have ever handled, my own.

After the squeal developed into a steady scream (we're talking about the brakes here, not the divorce, which was silent), I tried the two auto supply houses I usually dealt with, but had no luck. The counterman at Aberth's just gave me a blank look. At Park Slope Foreign Auto, I heard those dread words, "dealer item." Breaking (no pun intended) with my usual policy, I went to the Volvo dealer in Bay Ridge, and the parts man, one of those Jamaicans who seem to think being rude is the same thing as being funny, fished around in his bins and placed a pile of pins, clips, and springs on the counter.

"That'll be twenty-eight dollars, mon," he said, with what they used to call a shit-eating grin. When I complained (or as we lawyers like to say, objected), he pointed at the spring which was spray-painted yellow, and said, "Well, you see, they're gold, mon!" Then he spun on one heel to enjoy the laughs of his co-workers, and I left. There is a limit.

So I let the brakes squeal for another week. They got worse and worse. Ambulances were pulling over to let me by, thinking I had priority. Then I tried spraying the pads with WD-40.

Don't ever try that.

On Friday morning I went back to Park Slope Foreign Auto and pleaded (another legal specialty) for help. Vinnie, the boss's son, told me to try Boulevard Imports in Howard Beach, out where Queens and Brooklyn come together at the edge of Jamaica Bay. Since I didn't have court that day, I decided to give it a try.

The brakes howled all the way. I found Boulevard Imports on Rockaway Boulevard just off the Belt Parkway. It was a dark, grungy, impressive-looking cave of a joint, with guys in coveralls lounging around drinking coffee and waiting on deliveries. I was hopeful.

The counterman, another Vinnie, listened to my tale of woe before dashing my hopes with the dread words: "Dealer item." Then the guy in line behind me, still another Vinnie (everyone wore their names over their pockets) said, "Send him to Frankie in the Hole."

The Vinnie behind the counter shook his head, saying, "He'd never find it."

I turned to the other Vinnie and asked, "Frankie in the Hole?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Frankie runs a little junkyard," he said. "Volvos only. You know the Hole?"

"Can't say as I do."

"I'm not surprised. Here's what you do. Listen carefully, because it's not so easy to find these days, and I'm only going to tell you once."

There's no way I could describe or even remember everything this Vinnie told me: suffice it to say that it had to do with crossing over Rockaway Boulevard, then back under the Belt Parkway, forking onto a service road, making a U turn onto Conduit but staying in the center lane, cutting a sharp left into a dead end (that really wasn't), and following a dirt track down a steep bank through a grove of trees and brush.

I did as I was told, and found myself in a sort of sunken neighborhood, on a wide, dirt street running between decrepit houses set at odd angles on weed-grown lots. It looked like one of those left-over neighborhoods in the meadowlands of Jersey, or down South, where I did my basic training. There were no sidewalks but plenty of potholes, abandoned gardens, and vacant lots. The streets were half-covered by huge puddles. The houses were of concrete block, or tarpaper, or board and batten, no two alike or even remotely similar; there was even a house trailer, illegal in New York City (of course, so is crime). There were no street signs, so I couldn't tell if I was in Brooklyn or Queens, or on the dotted line between the two.

The other Vinnie (or third, if you are counting) had told me to follow my nose until I found a small junkyard, which I proceeded to do. Mine was the only car on the street. Weaving around the puddles (or cruising through them like a motorboat) gave driving an almost nautical air of adventure. There was no shortage of junk in the Hole, including a subway car someone was living in, and a crane that had lost its verticality and took up two backyards. Another backyard had a piebald pony. The few people I saw were white. A fat woman in a short dress sat on a high step talking on a portable phone. A gang of kids were gathered around a puddle, killing something with sticks. In the yard behind them was a card table with a crude sign reading "MOON ROCKS R US."

I liked the peaceful scene in the Hole. And driving through the puddles quietened my brakes. I saw plenty of junk cars, but they came in ones or twos, in the yards and on the street, and none of them were Volvos (no surprise).

After I passed the piebald pony twice, I realized I was going in circles. Then I noticed a chain link fence with reeds woven into it. And I had a feeling.

I stopped. The fence was just too high to look over, but I could see

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between the reeds. I was right. It was a junkyard that had been "ladybirded."

The lot hidden by the fence was filled with cars, squeezed together tightly, side by side and end to end. All from Sweden. All immortal and all dead. All indestructible, and all destroyed. All Volvos.

The first thing you learn in law school is when not to look like a lawyer. I left my tie and jacket in the car, pulled on my coveralls, and followed the fence around to a gate. On the gate was a picture of a snarling dog. The picture was (it turned out) all the dog there was, but it was enough; it slowed you down. Made you think.

The gate was unlocked. I opened it enough to slip through. I was in a narrow driveway, the only open space in the junkyard. The rest was packed so tightly with Volvos that there was barely room to squeeze between them. They were lined up in rows, some facing north and some south (or was it east and west?) so that it looked like a traffic jam in Hell. The gridlock of the dead.

At the end of the driveway, there was a ramshackle garage made of corrugated iron, shingleboard, plywood, and fiberglass. In and around it, too skinny to cast shade, were several ailanthuses—New York's parking lot tree. There were no signs but none were needed. This had to be Frankie's.

Only one living car was in the junkyard. It stood at the end of the driveway, by the garage, with its hood raised, as if it were trying to speak but had forgotten what it wanted to say. It was a 164, Volvo's unusual straight six. The body was battered, with bondo under the taillights and doors where rust had been filled in. It had cheap imitation racing wheels and a chrome racing stripe along the bottom of the doors. Two men were leaning over, peering into the engine compartment.

I walked up and watched, unwelcomed but not (I suspected) unnoticed. An older white man in coveralls bent over the engine while a black man in a business suit looked on and kibitzed in a rough but friendly way. I noticed, because this was the late 1980s, and the relations between black and white weren't all that friendly in New York.

And here we were in Howard Beach. Or at least in a Hole in Howard Beach.

"If you weren't so damn cheap, you'd get a Weber and throw these SUs away," the white man said.

"If I wasn't so damn cheap, you'd never see my ass," the black man said. He had a West Indian accent.

"I find you a good car and you turn it into a piece of island junk."

"You sell me a piece of trash and . . . "

And so forth. But all very friendly. I stood waiting patiently until the old man raised his head and lifted his eyeglasses, wiped along the two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

Piers Anthony

Coming in January—the latest installment in Piers Anthony's internationally bestselling Xanth series.

"Piers Anthony is one of those authors who can perform magic with the ordinary... he makes a book more than words to read...he is a craftsman."
—A READER'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE FICTION

0-312-85390-4 • $21.95

TOR BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sides of his grease-smeared nose, and then pretended to notice me for the first time.

"You Frankie?" I asked.

"Nope."

"This is Frankie's, though?"

"Could be." Junkyard men like the conditional.

So do lawyers. "I was wondering if it might be possible to find some brake parts for a 145, a 1970. Station wagon."

"What you're looking for is an antique dealer," the West Indian said.

The old man laughed; they both laughed. I didn't.

"Brake hardware," I said. "The clips and pins and stuff."

"Hard to find," the old man said. "That kind of stuff is very expensive these days."

The second thing you learn in law school is when to walk away. I was almost at the end of the drive when the old man reached through the window of the 164 and blew the horn: two shorts and a long.

At the far end of the yard, by the fence, a head popped up. I thought I was seeing a cartoon, because the eyes were too large for the head, and the head was too large for the body.

"Yeah, Unc?"

"Frankie, I'm sending a lawyer fellow back there. Show him that 145 we pulled the wheels off of last week."

"I'll take a look," I said. "But what makes you think I'm an attorney?"

"The tassels," the old man said, looking down at my loafers. He stuck his head back under the hood of the 164 to let me know I was dismissed.

Frankie's hair was almost white, and so thin it floated off the top of his head. His eyes were bright blue-green, and slightly bugged out, giving him an astonished look. He wore cowboy boots with the heels rolled over so far that he walked on their sides and left scrollwork for tracks. Like the old man, he was wearing blue gabardine pants and a lighter blue work shirt. On the back it said—

But I didn't notice what it said. I wasn't paying attention. I had never seen so many Volvos in one place before. There was every make and model—station wagons, sedans, fastbacks, 544s and 122s, DLs and GLs, 140s to 740s, even a 940—in every state of dissolution, destruction, decay, desolation, degradation, decrepitude, and disrepair. It was beautiful. The Volvos were jammed so close together that I had to edge sideways between them.

We made our way around the far corner of the garage, where I saw a huge jumbled pile—not a stack—of tires against the fence. It was cooler here. The ailanthus trees were waving though I could feel no breeze.

"This what you're looking for?" Frankie stopped by a 145 sedan—dark

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

green, like my station wagon; it was a popular color. The wheels were gone and it sat on the ground. By each wheel well lay a hubcap, filled with water.

There was a hollow thud behind us. A tire had come over the fence, onto the pile; another followed it. "I need to get back to work," Frankie said. "You can find what you need, right?"

He left me with the 145, called out to someone over the fence, then started pulling tires off the pile and rolling them through a low door into a shed built onto the side of the garage. The shed was only about five feet high. The door was half covered by a plastic shower curtain hung sideways. It was slit like a hula skirt and every time a tire went through it, it went *pop*.

Every time Frankie rolled a tire through the door, another sailed over the fence onto the pile behind him. It seemed like the labors of Sisyphus.

Well, I had my own work. Carefully, I drained the water out of the first hubcap. There lay the precious springs and clips I sought, rusty but usable. I worked my way around the car (a job in itself, as it was jammed so closely with the others). I drained the four hubcaps and collected all the treasure into one of them. It was like panning for gold.

There was a cool breeze and a funny smell. Behind me I heard a steady *pop, pop, pop*. But when I finished and took the brake parts to Frankie, the pile of tires was still the same size. Frankie was on top of it, leaning on the fence, talking with an Indian man in a Goodyear shirt

The Indian (who must have been standing on a truck on the other side of the fence) saw me and ducked. I had scared him away. I realized I was witnessing some kind of illegal dumping operation. I wondered how all the junk tires fit into the tiny shed, but I wasn't about to ask. Probably Frankie and the old man took them out and dumped them into Jamaica Bay every night.

I showed Frankie the brake parts. "I figure they're worth a couple of bucks," I said.

"Show Unc," he said. "He'll tell you what they're worth."

I'll bet, I thought. Carrying my precious hubcap of brake hardware, like a waiter with a dish, I started back toward the driveway. Behind me I heard a steady *pop, pop, pop* as Frankie went back to work. I must have been following a different route between the cars—because when I saw it, I knew it was for the first time.

The 1800 is Volvo's legendary (well, sort of) sports car from the early 1960s. The first model, the P1800, was assembled in Scotland and England (unusual, to say the least, for a Swedish car). This one, the only one I had ever seen in a junkyard, still had its fins and appeared to have all its glass. It was dark blue. I edged up to it, afraid that if I alarmed it, it might disappear. But it was real. It was wheelless, engineless, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rusted out in the rocker panels, but it was real. I looked inside. I tapped on the glass. I opened the door.

The interior was the wrong color, but it was real too. It smelled musty, but it was intact. Or close enough. I arrived at the driveway so excited that I didn't even flinch when the old man looked into my hubcap (like a fortune teller reading entrails) and said, "Ten dollars."

I raced home to tell Wu what I had found.

Two

Everybody should have a friend like Wilson Wu, just to keep them guessing. Wu worked his way through high school as a pastry chef, then dropped out to form a rock band, then won a scholarship to Princeton (I think) for math (I think), then dropped out to get a job as an engineer, then made it halfway through medical school at night before becoming a lawyer, which is where I met him. He passed his bar exam on the first try. Somewhere along the line he decided he was gay, then decided he wasn't (I don't know what his wife thought of all this); he has been both Democrat and Republican, Catholic and Protestant, pro and anti gun control. He can't decide if he's Chinese or American, or both. The only constant thing in his life is the Volvo. Wu has never owned another kind of car. He kept a 1984 240DL station wagon for the wife and kids. He kept his P1800, which I had helped him tow from Pennsylvania, where he had bought it at a yard sale for $500 (a whole other story), in my garage. I didn't charge him rent. It was a red 1961 sports coupe with a B18. The engine and transmission were good (well, fair) but the interior had been gutted. Wu had found seats but hadn't yet put them in. He was waiting for the knobs and trim and door panels, the little stuff that is hardest to find, especially for a P1800. He had been looking for two years.

Wu lived on my block in Brooklyn, which was strictly a coincidence since I knew him from Downtown Brooklyn Law School and Legal Aid, where we had both worked before going into private practice. I found him in his kitchen, helping his wife decorate a wedding cake. She's a caterer. "What are you doing in the morning?" I asked, but I didn't wait for him to tell me. I have never been good at surprises (which is why I had no success as a criminal lawyer). "Your long travail is over," I said. "I found an 1800. A P1800. With an interior."

"Handles?"

"Handles."

"Panels?"

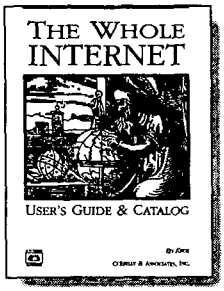
"Panels."

"Knobs?" Wu had stopped stirring. I had his attention.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

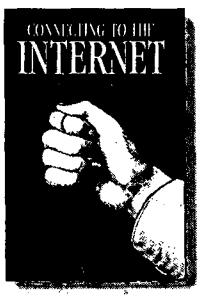
Get Connected.

You've read about cyberspace in classics from William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. That's still science-fiction, but it's not far off, once world-wide networking comes together with "virtual reality."



Here's a book on the technology as it is now– a comprehensive introduction to the international network of computer systems called the "Internet." The "Internet" is more than just a single network; it's the nexus of virtually every computer network in the world. Whether you're a researcher, a student, or just someone who likes to send electronic mail to friends, the Internet is a global resource of almost unimaginable wealth.

The Whole Internet Catalog & User's Guide covers the basic utilities that you use to access the network (telnet, ftp, mail and news readers). But it also does much more. This guide pays close attention to several important "information servers" (Archie, Wais, Gopher) that are, essentially, databases of databases: they help you find what you want among the millions of files and thousands of archives available. We've also included our own "database of databases" – a resource index that covers a broad selection of several hundred important resources found on the net, ranging from the King James Bible to the CIA World Factbook. Even if you've been around the net for a few years, you'll still be able to discover resources that you didn't know existed.



If you're not yet on the Internet, *Connecting To The Internet* provides practical advice on how to get connected. It helps you assess your needs to determine the kind of Internet service that is best for you. Then it describes how to find local access providers and evaluate the services they offer.

So if you use the Internet for work or for pleasure –or if you'd like to, but don't know how – these are the books for you.

The Whole Internet User's Guide & Catalog
By Ed Krol, 400 pages, ISBN: 1-56592-025-2, $24.95

Connecting to the Internet: An O'Reilly Buyer's Guide
By Susan Estrada, 1st Edition August 1993, 188 pages, ISBN: 1-56592-061-9, $15.95

O'Reilly & Associates, Inc.

103A Morris St., Sebastopol, CA 95472 • (800) 998-9938 • (707) 829-0515 • Fax (707) 829-0104
order@ora.com A42S

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

"I see you got your brakes fixed," Wu said the next day as we were on our way to Howard Beach in my car. "Or perhaps I should say, 'I hear.' "

"I found the parts yesterday and put them on this morning," I told him. I told him the story of how I had found the Hole. I told him about the junkyard of Volvos. I told him about stumbling across the dark blue P1800. By then, we were past the end of Atlantic Avenue, near Howard Beach. I turned off onto Conduit and tried to retrace my turns of the day before, but with no luck. Nothing looked familiar.

Wu started to look skeptical; or maybe I should say, he started to look even more skeptical. "Maybe it was all a dream," he said, either taunting me or comforting himself, or both.

"I don't imagine P1800s in junkyards even in dreams," I said. But in spite of my best efforts to find the Hole, I was going in circles. Finally, I gave up and went to Boulevard Imports. The place was almost empty. I didn't recognize the counterman. His shirt said he was a Sal.

"Vinnie's off," he said. "It's Saturday."

"Then maybe you can help me. I'm trying to find a place called Frankie's. In the Hole."

People sometimes use the expression "blank look" loosely. Sal's was the genuine article.

"A Volvo junkyard?" I said. "A pony or so?"

Blank got even blanker. Wu had come in behind me, and I didn't have to turn around to know he was looking skeptical.

"I don't know about any Volvos, but did somebody mention a pony?" a voice said from in the back. An old man came forward. He must have been doing the books, because he was wearing a tie. "My pop used to keep a pony in the Hole. We sold it when horseshoes got scarce during the war."

"Jeez, Vinnie, what war was this?" Sal asked. (So I had found another Vinnie!)

"How many have there been?" the old Vinnie asked. He turned to me. "Now, listen up, kid." (I couldn't help smiling; usually only judges call me "kid," and only in chambers.) "I can only tell you once, and I'm not sure I'll get it right."

The old Vinnie's instructions were completely different from the ones I had gotten from the Vinnie the day before. They involved a turn into an abandoned gas station on the Belt Parkway, a used car lot on Conduit, a McDonald's with a dumpster in the back, plus other flourishes that I have forgotten.

Suffice it to say that, twenty minutes later, after bouncing down a steep bank, Wu and I found ourselves cruising the wide mud streets of the Hole, looking for Frankie's. I could tell by Wu's silence that he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impressed. The Hole is pretty impressive if you are not expecting it, and who's expecting it? There was the non-vertical crane, the subway car (with smoke coming from its makeshift chimney), and the pony grazing in a lot between two shanties. I wondered if it was a descendant of the old Vinnie's father's pony. I couldn't tell if it was shod or not.

The fat lady was still on the phone. The kids must have heard us coming, because they were standing in front of the card table waving hand-lettered signs: "Moon Rocks This Way!" and "Moon Rocks R Us!" When he saw them, Wu put his hand on my arm and said, "Pull over, Irv."—his first words since we had descended into the Hole. I pulled over and he got out. He fingered a couple of ashy-looking lumps, and handed the kids a dollar. They giggled and said they had no change.

Wu told them to keep it.

"I hope you don't behave like that at Frankie's," I said, when he got back into the car.

"Like what?"

"You're supposed to bargain, Wu. People expect it. Even kids. What do you want with phony moon rocks anyway?"

"Supporting free enterprise," he said. "Plus, I worked on Apollo and I handled some real moon rocks once. They looked just like these." He sniffed them. "Smelled just like these." He tossed them out the window into the shallow water as we motored through a puddle.

As impressive as the Hole can be (first time), there is nothing more impressive than a junkyard of all Volvos. I couldn't wait to see Wu's face when he saw it. I wasn't disappointed. I heard him gasp as we slipped through the gate. He looked around, then looked at me and grinned. "Astonishing," he said. Even the inscrutable, skeptical Wu.

"Thank you," I said. (I could hardly wait till he saw the P1800!)

The old man was at the end of the driveway, working on a diesel this time. Another customer, this one white, looked on and kibitzed. The old man seemed to sell entertainment as much as expertise. They were trying to get water out of the injectors.

"I understand you have an 1800," Wu said, and added: "They're hard to find."

I winced. Wu was no businessman. The old man straightened up, and looked us over. There's nothing like a six-foot Chinaman to get your attention, and Wu is six-two.

"P1800," the old man said. "Hard to find is hardly the word for it. I'd call it your rare luxury item. But I guess it won't cost you nothing to have a look." He reached around the diesel's windshield and honked the horn. Two shorts and a long.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The oversized head with the oversized eyes appeared at the far end of the yard, by the fence.

"Two lawyers coming back," the old man called out. Then he said to me: "It's easier to head straight back along the garage till you get to where Frankie is working. Then head to your right, and you'll find the P1800."

Frankie was still working on the endless pile (not a stack) of tires by the fence. Each one went through the low door of the shed with a *pop*.

I nodded a greeting, and Frankie nodded back. I turned right and edged between the cars toward the P1800, assuming Wu was right behind me. When I saw it, I was relieved—it had not been a dream after all! I expected an appreciative whistle (at the very least), but when I turned, I saw that I had lost Wu.

He was still back by the garage, looking through a stack (not a pile) of wheels against the wall.

"Hey, Wu!" I said, standing on the bumper of the P1800. "You can get wheels anywhere. Check out the interior on this baby!" Then, afraid I had sounded too enthusiastic, I added: "It's rough but it might almost do."

Wu didn't even bother to answer me. He pulled two wheels from the stack. They weren't exactly wheels, at least not the kind you mount tires on. They were more like wire mesh tires, with metal chevrons where the tread should have been.

Wu set them upright, side by side. He slapped one and gray dust flew. He slapped the other. "Where'd you get these?" he asked.

Frankie stopped working and lit a cigarette. "Off a dune buggy," he said.

By this time, I had joined them. "A Volvo dune buggy?"

"Not a Volvo," Frankie said. "An electric job. Can't sell you the wheels separately. They're a set."

"What about the dune buggy?" Wu asked. "Can I have a look at it?"

Frankie's eyes narrowed. "It's on the property. Hey, are you some kind of environment man or something?"

"The very opposite," said Wu. "I'm a lawyer. I just happen to dig dune buggies. Can I have a look at it? Good ones are hard to find."

I winced.

"I'll have to ask Unc," Frankie said.

"Wu," I said, as soon as Frankie had left to find his uncle, "there's something you need to know about junkyard men. If something is hard to find, you don't have to tell them. And what's this dune buggy business, anyway? I thought you wanted interior trim for your P1800."

"Forget the P1800, Irv," Wu said. "It's yours. I'm giving it to you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're what?"

Wu slapped the wire mesh wheel again and sniffed the cloud of dust. "Do you realize what this is, Irv?"

"Some sort of wire wheel. So what?"

"I worked at Boeing in 1970," Wu said. "I helped build this baby, Irv. It's off the LRV."

"The LR what?'

Before Wu could answer, Frankie was back. "Well, you can look at it," he said. "But you got to hold your breath. It's in the cave and there's no air in there."

"The cave?" I said. They both ignored me.

"You can see it from the door, but I'm not going back in there," said Frankie. "Unc won't let me. Have you got a jacket? It's cold."

"I'll be okay," Wu said.

"Suit yourself." Frankie tossed Wu a pair of plastic welding goggles. "Wear these. And remember, hold your breath."

It was clear at this point where the cave was. Frankie was pointing toward the low door into the shed, where he rolled the tires. Wu put on the goggles and ducked his head; as he went through the doorway he made that same weird *pop* the tires made.

I stood there with Frankie in the sunlight, holding the two wire mesh wheels, feeling like a fool.

There was another *pop* and Wu backed out through the shower curtain. When he turned around, he looked like he had seen a ghost. I don't know how else to describe it. Plus he was shivering like crazy.

"Told you it was cold!" said Frankie. "And it's weird. There's no air in there, for one thing. If you want the dune buggy, you'll have to get it out of there yourself."

Wu gradually stopped shivering. As he did, a huge grin spread across his face. "It's weird, all right," he said. "Let me show my partner. Loan me some extra goggles."

"I'll take your word for it," I said.

"Irv, come on! Put these goggles on."

"No way!" I said. But I put them on. I always did what Wu said, sooner or later; he was that kind of guy.

"Don't hold your breath in. Let it all out, and then hold it. Come on. Follow me."

I breathed out and ducked down just in time; Wu grabbed my hand and pulled me through the shed door behind him. If I made a *pop* I didn't hear it. We were standing in the door of a cave—but looking out, not in. The inside was another outside!

It was like the beach, all gray sand (or dust) but with no water. I could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

see stars but it wasn't dark. The dust was greenish gray, like a courthouse hallway (a color familiar to lawyers).

My ears were killing me. And it was cold!

We were at the top of a long, smooth slope, like a dune, which was littered with tires. At the bottom was a silver dune buggy with no front wheels, sitting nose down in the gray dust.

Wu pointed at it. He was grinning like a maniac. I had seen enough. Pulling my hand free, I stepped back through the shower curtain and gasped for air. This time I heard a "pop" as I went through.

The warm air felt great. My ears gradually quit ringing. Frankie was sitting on his tire pile, smoking a cigarette. "Where's your buddy? He can't stay in there."

Just then, Wu backed out through the curtain with a loud *pop*. "I'll take it," he said, as soon as he had filled his lungs with air. "I'll take it!"

I winced. Twice.

"I'll have to ask Unc," said Frankie.

"Wu," I said, as soon as Frankie had left to find his uncle, "let me tell you something about junkyard men. You can't say 'I'll take it, I'll take it' around them. You have to say, 'Maybe it might do, or . . . ' "

"Irving!" Wu cut me off. His eyes were wild. (He hardly ever called me Irving.) He took both my hands in his, as if we were bride and groom, and began to walk me in a circle. His fingers were freezing. "Irving, do you know, do you realize, where we just were?"

"Some sort of cave? Haven't we played this game before?"

"The Moon! Irving, that was the surface of the Moon you just saw!"

"I admit it was weird," I said. "But the Moon is a million miles away. And it's up in the air . . . "

"Quarter of a million," Wu said. "But I'll explain later." Frankie was back, with his uncle. "That dune buggy's one of a kind," the old man said. "I couldn't take less than five hundred for it."

Wu said, "I'll take it!"

I winced.

"But you've got to get it out of the cave yourself," the old man said. "I don't want Frankie going in there anymore. That's why I told the kids, no more rocks."

"No problem," Wu said. "Are you open tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow's Sunday," said the old man.

"What about Monday?"

I followed Wu through the packed-together Volvos to the front gate. We were on the street before I realized he hadn't even bothered to look

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the P1800. "You're the best thing that ever happened to those two," I said. I was a little pissed off. More than a little.

"There's no doubt about it," Wu said.

"Damn right there's no doubt about it!" I started my 145 and headed up the street, looking for an exit from the Hole. Any exit. "Five hundred dollars for a junk dune buggy?"

"No doubt about it at all. That was either the Hadley Appenines, or Descartes, or Taurus-Littrow," Wu said. "I guess I could tell by looking at the serial numbers on the LRV."

"I never heard of a Hadley or a Descartes," I said, "but I know Ford never made a dune buggy." I found a dirt road that led up through a clump of trees. Through the branches I could see the full Moon, pale in the afternoon sky. "And there's the Moon, right there in the sky, where it's supposed to be."

"There's apparently more than one way to get to the Moon, Irving. Which they are using as a dump for old tires. We saw it with our own eyes!"

The dirt road gave out in a vacant lot on Conduit. I crossed a sidewalk, bounced down a curb, and edged into the traffic. Now that I was headed back toward Brooklyn, I could pay attention. "Wu," I said. "Just because you worked for NAPA—"

"NASA, Irv. And I didn't work for them, I worked for Boeing."

"Whatever. Science is not my thing. But I know for a fact that the Moon is in the sky. We were in a hole in the ground, although it was weird, I admit."

"A hole with stars?" Wu said. "With no air? Smell the coffee, Irv." He found an envelope in my glove compartment and began scrawling on it with a pencil. "No, I suspected it when I saw those tires. They are from the Lunar Roving Vehicle, better known as the LRV or the lunar rover. Only three were built and all three were left on the Moon. Apollo 15, 16, and 17. 1971 and 1972. Surely you remember."

"Sure," I said. The third thing you learn in law school is never to admit you don't remember something. "So how did this loonie rover get to Brooklyn?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out," Wu said. "I suspect we're dealing with one of the rarest occurences in the universe. A neotopological meta-euclidean adjacentcy."

"A non-logical metaphysical what?"

Wu handed me the envelope. It was covered with numbers—

$$\int_0^{\infty} x e^{-\Delta_3 \frac{1}{g^2}} F^2 \sqrt{\frac{\Delta \cdot dx}{\frac{1420\ mhz}{CTL}}} \cdot \frac{17\pi}{4\Sigma c_i c_i} = \frac{H}{h}$$

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That explains the whole thing," Wu said. "A neotopological metaeuclidean adjacentcy. It's quite rare. In fact, I think this may be the only one."

"You're sure about this?"

"I used to be a physicist."

"I thought it was an engineer."

"Before that. Look at the figures, Irv! Numbers don't lie. That equation shows how space-time can be folded so that two parts are adjacent that are also, at the same time, separated by millions of miles. Or a quarter of a million, anyway."

"So we're talking about a sort of back door to the Moon?"

"Exactly."

Three

On Sundays I had visitation rights to the big-screen TV. I watched golf and stock car racing all afternoon with my wife, switching back and forth during commercials. We got along a lot better now that we weren't speaking. Especially when she was holding the remote. On Monday morning, Wu arrived at the door at nine o'clock sharp, wearing coveralls and carrying a shopping bag and a tool box.

"How do you know I don't have court today?" I asked.

"Because I know you have only one case at present, your divorce, in which you are representing both parties in order to save money. Hi, Diane."

"Hi, Wu." (She was speaking to *him*.)

We took my 145. Wu was silent all the way out Eastern Parkway, doing figures on a cocktail napkin from a Bay Ridge nightclub. "Go out last night?" I asked. After a whole day with Diane, I was dying to have somebody to talk to.

"Something was bothering me all night," he said. "Since the surface of the Moon is a vacuum, how come all the air on Earth doesn't rush through the shed door, along with the tires?"

"I give up," I said.

We were at a stoplight. "There it is," he said. He handed me the napkin, on which was scrawled—

$$\frac{H}{h} = \int_{WAP}^{\infty} \frac{1420}{\Delta 33} dx \frac{1}{4} \Big/ \frac{\sqrt{RHT}}{4\Delta(\pi^0)} \cdot \sum_{K\cos^2} \frac{dx}{} = \frac{h}{H}$$

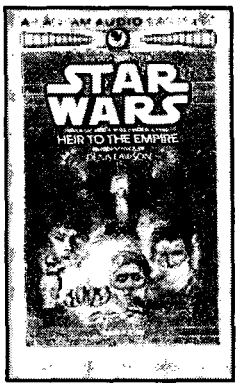
"There what is?"

"The answer to my question. As those figures demonstrate, Irv, we're

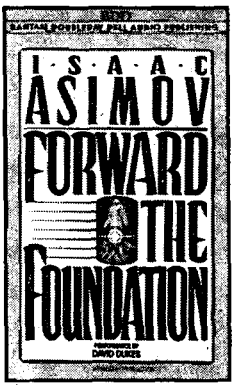
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCIENCE FICTION THAT SOUNDS OUT OF THIS WORLD!

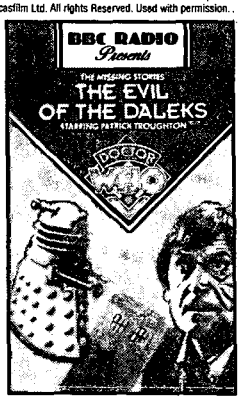
EXPERIENCE YOUR FAVORITES ON AUDIO.



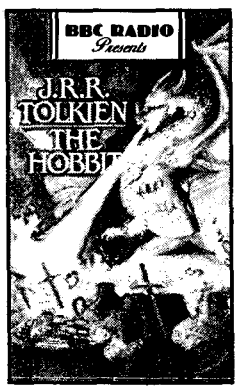
A deluxe audio production, complete with original Star Wars® music and sound effects.
® and ©1993 Lucasfilm Ltd. All rights Reserved. Used with permission..



The final volume of the Grand Master's bestselling *Foundation* series.



The soundtrack to one of the early missing episodes of *Dr. Who,* starring Patrick Troughton.



A stunning full-cast dramatization of Tolkien's classic, with stirring music and sound effects.

BDD

BANTAM DOUBLEDAY DELL AUDIO PUBLISHING

Bestselling science fiction on tape — available wherever books and audiocassettes are sold.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not just dealing with a neotopological metaeuclidean adjacentcy. We're dealing with an *incongruent* neotopological metaeuclidean adjacentcy. The two areas are still separated by a quarter of a million miles, even though that distance has been folded to less than a centimeter. It's all there in black and white. See?"

"I guess," I said. The fourth thing you learn in law school is to never admit you don't understand something.

"The air doesn't rush through because it can't. It can kind of seep through, though, which creates a slight microclimate in the immediate vicinity of the adjacentcy. Which is probably why we don't die immediately of decompression. A tire can roll through, if you give it a shove, but air is too, too . . . "

"Too wispy to shove," I said.

"Exactly."

I looked for the turn off Conduit, but nothing was familiar. I tried a few streets, but none of them led us into the Hole. "Not again!" Wu complained.

"Again!" I answered.

I went back to Boulevard. Vinnie was behind the counter today, and he remembered me (with a little prodding).

"You're not the only one having trouble finding the Hole," he said. "It's been hard to find lately."

"What do you mean, 'lately'?" Wu asked from the doorway.

"Just this last year. Every month or so it gets hard to find. I think it has to do with the Concorde. I read somewhere that the noise affects the tide, and the Hole isn't that far from Jamaica Bay, you know."

"Can you draw us a map?" I asked.

"I never took drawing," Vinnie said, "so listen up close."

Vinnie's instructions had to do with an abandoned railroad track, a wrong way turn onto a one-way street, a dog-leg that cut across a health club parking lot, and several other ins and outs. While I was negotiating all this, Wu was scrawling on the back of a car wash flyer he had taken from Vinnie's counter.

"The tide," he muttered. "I should have known!"

I didn't ask him what he meant; I figured (I knew!) he would tell me. But before he had a chance, we were bouncing down a dirt track through some scruffy trees, and onto the now-familiar dirt streets of the Hole. "Want some more moon rocks?" I asked when we passed the kids and their stand.

"I'll pick up my own today, Irv!"

I pulled up by the gate and we let ourselves in. Wu carried the shopping bag; he gave me the tool box.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old man was working on an ancient 122, the Volvo that looks like a '48 Ford from the back. (It was always one of my favorites.) "It's electric," he said when Wu and I walked up.

"The 122?" I asked.

"The dune buggy," the old man said. "Electric is the big thing now. All the cars in California are going to be electric next year. It's the law."

"No, it's not," I said. "So what, anyway?"

"That makes that dune buggy worth a lot of money."

"No, it doesn't. Besides, you already agreed on a price."

"That's right. Five hundred," Wu said. He pulled five bills from his pocket and unfolded them.

"I said I couldn't take *less* than five hundred," the old man said. "I never said I couldn't take more."

Before Wu could answer, I pulled him behind the 122. "Remember the second thing we learned in law school?" I said. "When to walk away. We can come back next week—if you still want that thing."

Wu shook his head. "It won't be here next week. I realized something when Vinnie told us that the Hole was getting hard to find. The adjacentcy is warping the neighborhood as well as the cislunar space-time continuum. And since it's lunar, it has a monthly cycle. Look at this."

He handed me the car wash flyer, on the back of which was scrawled—

$$T = \frac{\alpha\sqrt{\frac{L}{G}}}{H(t)} = \frac{1}{g^2}F^2$$

"See?" said Wu. "We're not just dealing with an incongruent neotopological metaeuclidean adjacentcy. We're dealing with a *periodic* incongruent neotopological metaeuclidean adjacentcy."

"Which means . . . "

"The adjacentcy comes and goes. With the Moon."

"Sort of like PMS."

"Exactly. I haven't got the figures adjusted for daylight savings time yet, but the Moon is on the wane, and I'm pretty sure that after today, Frankie will be out of the illegal dumping business for a month at least."

"Perfect. So we come back next month."

"Irv, I don't want to take the chance. Not with a million dollars at stake."

"Not with a what?" He had my attention.

"That LRV cost two million new, and only three of them were made. Once we get it out, all we have to do is contact NASA. Or Boeing. Or the Air & Space Museum at the Smithsonian. But we've got to strike while

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the iron is hot. Give me a couple of hundred bucks and I'll give you a fourth interest."

"A half."

"A third. Plus the P1800."

"You already gave me the P1800."

"Yeah, but I was only kidding. Now I'm serious."

"Deal," I said. But instead of giving Wu two hundred, I plucked the five hundreds out of his hand. "But you stick to the numbers. I do all the talking."

We got it for six hundred. Non refundable. "What does that mean?" Wu asked.

"It means you boys own the dune buggy whether you get it out of the cave or not," said the old man, counting his money.

"Fair enough," said Wu. It didn't seem fair to me at all, but I kept my mouth shut. I couldn't imagine a scenario in which we would get our money back from the old man, anyway.

He went back to work on the engine of the 122, and Wu and I headed for the far end of the yard. We found Frankie rolling tires through the shed door: *Pop, pop, pop*. The pile by the fence was as big as ever. He waved and kept on working.

Wu set down the shopping bag and pulled out two of those spandex bicycling outfits. He handed one to me, and started taking off his shoes.

I'll spare you the ensuing interchange—what I said, what he said, objections, arguments, etc. Suffice it to say that, ten minutes later, I was wearing black and purple tights under my coveralls, and so was Wu. Supposedly, they were to keep our skin from blistering in the vacuum. Wu was hard to resist when he had his mind made up.

I wondered what Frankie thought of it all. He just kept rolling tires through the doorway, one by one.

There were more surprises in the bag. Wu pulled out rubber gloves and wool mittens, a brown bottle with Chinese writing on it, a roll of clear plastic vegetable bags from the supermarket, a box of cotton balls, a roll of duct tape, and a rope.

Frankie didn't say anything until Wu got to the rope. Then he stopped working, sat down on the pile of tires, lit a cigarette and said: "Won't work."

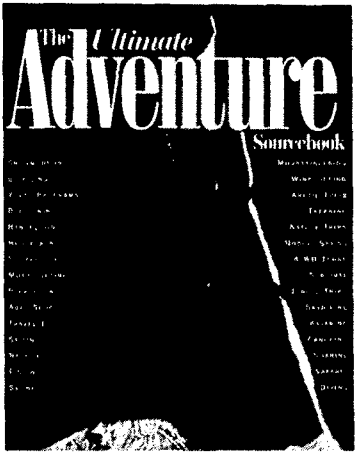
Wu begged his pardon.

"I'll show you," Frankie said. He tied one end of the rope to a tire and tossed it through the low door into the shed. There was the usual *pop* and then a fierce crackling noise.

Smoke blew out the door. Wu and I both jumped back.

Frankie pulled the rope back, charred on one end. There was no tire.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WONDERFUL GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

THE HEART OF HEALING
From the beginning of time, man's preoccupation with healing the body has been an almost religious pursuit. *The Heart of Healing,* by The Noetic Sciences Institute with William Poole, is an amazing documentation of the mind connection in the healing of the human body. See how fascinating reports of unconventional methods of treatment are repeatedly challenging some of our most deeply held beliefs about traditional medicine. This hardcover edition, with over 150 photographs in addition to illustrations and graphics, has 225 pages that focus on people across the world and explore how belief systems are at the heart of healing.

THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE SOURCEBOOK
Looking for exotic destinations? Daring adventures? Unique excursions? Here is the most action-packed vacation guide for adventurers and travelers alike. This unique reference book covers everything from motorcycling and sailing to skydiving and safaris. The softcover volume includes detailed descriptions of both domestic and international adventures with prices and itineraries. With 432 information-packed pages and over 400 full-color photographs, *The Ultimate Adventure Sourcebook* is *the* complete resource for adventure, sports and travel.

Please send me: ____ copies of *The Heart of Healing* @ **$24.95** each.
____ copies of *The Ultimate Adventure Sourcebook* @ **$29.95** each.
Please add $2.00 per book for shipping & handling. NYS residents add 8.25% sales tax.
Please make check or money order payable to **Turner Publishing, Inc.**
Send to: **Turner Publishing, Inc., 420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018**

024AS

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I learned the hard way," he said, "when I tried to pull the dune buggy through myself, before I took the wheels off."

"Of course!" Wu said. "What a fool I've been. I should have known!"

"Should have known what?" Frankie and I both asked at once.

Wu tore a corner off the shopping bag and started scrawling numbers on it with a pencil stub. "Should have known this!" he said, and he handed it to Frankie.

Frankie looked at it, shrugged, and handed it to me—

$$t_\mu \approx \frac{1}{c} \times \frac{e^4}{m_p m_e^2 c^3} \Big/ h(H)$$

"So?" I said.

"So, there it is!" Wu said. "As those figures clearly indicate, you can *pass through* a noncongruent adjacentcy, but you can't *connect* its two aspects. It's only logical. Imagine the differential energy stored when a quarter of a million miles of spacetime is folded to less than a millimeter."

"Burns right through a rope," Frankie said.

"Exactly."

"How about a chain?" I suggested.

"Melts a chain," said Frankie. "Never tried a cable, though."

"No substance known to man could withstand that awesome energy differential," Wu said. "Not even cable. That's why the tires make that *pop*. I'll bet you have to roll them hard or they bounce back, right?"

"Whatever you say," said Frankie, putting out his cigarette. He was losing interest.

"Guess that means we leave it there," I said. I had mixed feelings. I hated to lose a third of a million dollars, but I didn't like the looks of that charred rope. Or the smell. I was even willing to kiss my hundred bucks goodbye.

"Leave it there? No way. We'll *drive* it out!" Wu said. "Frankie, do you have some twelve volt batteries you can loan me? Three, to be exact."

"Unc's got some," said Frankie. "I suspect he'll want to sell them, though. Unc's not much of a loaner."

Why was I not surprised?

Half an hour later we had three twelve volt batteries in a supermarket shopping cart. The old man had wanted another hundred dollars, but since I was now a partner I did the bargaining, and we got them for twenty bucks apiece, charged and ready to go, with the cart thrown in. Plus three sets of jumper cables, on loan.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wu rolled the two wire mesh wheels through the shed door. Each went *pop* and was gone. He put the tool box into the supermarket cart with the batteries and the jumper cables. He pulled on the rubber gloves, and pulled the wool mittens over them. I did the same.

"Ready, Irv?" Wu said. (I would have said no, but I knew it wouldn't do any good, so I didn't say anything.) "We won't be able to talk on the Moon, so here's the plan. First, we push the cart through. Don't let it get stuck in the doorway where it connects the two aspects of the adjacentcy, or it'll start to heat up. Might even explode. Blow up both worlds. Who knows? Once we're through, you head down the hill with the cart. I'll bring the two wheels. When we get to the LRV, you pick up the front end and—"

"Don't we have a jack?"

"I'm expecting very low gravity. Besides, the LRV is lighter than a golf cart. Only 460 pounds, and that's here on Earth. You hold it up while I mount the wheels—I have the tools laid out in the tray of the tool box. Then you hand me the batteries, they go in front, and I'll connect them with the jumper cables, in series. Then we climb in and—"

"Aren't you forgetting something, Wu?" I said. "We won't be able to hold our breath long enough to do all that."

"Ah so!" Wu grinned and held up the brown bottle with Chinese writing on it. "No problem! I have here the ancient Chinese herbal treatment known as (he said some Chinese words) or 'Pond Explorer.' Han dynasty sages used it to lay underwater and meditate for hours. I ordered this from Hong Kong, where it is called (more Chinese words) or 'Mud Turtle Master' and used by thieves; but no matter, it's the same stuff. Hand me those cotton balls."

The bottle was closed with a cork. Wu uncorked it and poured thick brown fluid on a cotton ball; it hissed and steamed.

"Jesus," I said.

"Pond Explorer not only provides the blood with oxygen, it suppresses the breathing reflex. As a matter of fact, you *can't* breathe while it's under your tongue. Which means you can't talk. It also contracts the capillaries and slows the heartbeat. It also scours the nitrogen out of the blood so you don't get the bends."

"How do you know all this?"

"I was into organic chemistry for several years," Wu said. "Did my masters thesis on ancient oriental herbals. Never finished it, though."

"Before you studied math?"

"After math, before law. Open up."

As he prepared to put the cotton ball under my tongue, he said, "Pond Explorer switches your cortex to an ancient respiratory pattern predating the oxygenation of the Earth's atmosphere. Pretty old stuff, Irv! It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will feel perfectly natural, though. Breathe out and empty your lungs. There! When we come out, spit it out immediately so you can breathe and talk. It's that simple."

The Pond Explorer tasted bitter. I felt oxygen (or something) flooding my tongue and my cheeks. My mouth tingled. Once I got used to it, it wasn't so bad; as a matter of fact, it felt great. Except for the taste, which didn't go away.

Wu put his cotton ball under his tongue, smiled, and corked the bottle. Then, while I watched in alarm, he tore two plastic bags off the roll.

I saw what was coming. I backed away, shaking my head—

I'll spare you the ensuing interchange. Suffice it to say that, minutes later, we both had plastic bags over our heads, taped around our necks with duct tape. Once I got over my initial panic, it wasn't so bad. As always, Wu seemed to know what he was doing. And as always, it was no use resisting his plans.

If you're wondering what Frankie was making of all this, so was I. He had stopped working again. While my bag was being taped on, I saw him sitting on the pile of tires, watching us with those blue-green eyes; looking a little bored, as if he saw such goings-on every day.

It was time. Wu grabbed the front of the supermarket cart and I grabbed the handle. Wu spun his finger and pointed toward the shed door with its tattered shower curtain waving slightly in the ripples of the space-time interface. We were off!

I waved goodbye to Frankie. He lifted one finger in farewell as we ran through.

Four

From the Earth to the Moon—in one long step for mankind (and in particular, Wilson Wu). I heard a crackling, even through the plastic bag, and the supermarket cart shuddered and shook like a lawnmower with a bent blade. Then we were on the other side, and there was only a great huge cold empty silence.

Overhead were a million stars. At our feet, gray dust. The door we had come through was a dimly lighted hole under a low cliff behind us. We were looking down a gray slope strewn with tires. The flat area at the bottom of the slope was littered with empty bottles, wrappers, air tanks, a big tripod, and of course, the dune buggy—or LRV—nose down in the dust. There were tracks all around it. Beyond were low hills, gray-green except for an occasional black stone. Everything seemed close; there was no far away. Except for the tires, the junk and the tracks around the dune

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From our "Science Fiction" audio cassette series...

CLASSIC SCI-FI 'on' RADIO!

☛ **Did you ever wonder why the same Sci-Fi titles stay in the bookstores year after year? Why stories from the "Golden Age" are just as great today as they were then?**

☛ **Do you remember the "Golden Age Of Radio" when the only limit to the vistas on other planets was your own imagination?**

☛ **Both "Golden Ages" return with a special offer from Radio Yesteryear!**

☛ **Four hours of stories from "the far horizon of the unknown" with tales of new dimensions in time and space! On four audio cassettes.**

ZERO HOUR by Ray Bradbury. When the kids start to play the game of "Invasion" watch out for the arrival of "Drill."
KNOCK by Fredric Brown. The last man on Earth sat alone in his room, and then there was a knock on the door.
■ **FT-03 Cassette**

THE COLD EQUATIONS by Tom Godwin. When a lady stows away aboard a space ship, reality and the law of physics must be faced.
MARS IS HEAVEN by Ray Bradbury. The first explorers from Earth find Mars all they could possiby hope it to be!
AN IMBALANCE OF SPECIES based on "A Gun For Dinosaur" by Ray Bradbury.
■ **FT-09 Cassette**

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS. One of the most famous radio dramas brought up to date. The Martians invade and destroy our civilization! With Dana Andrews, Pat Crowley and William Conrad. The CBS radio broadcast heard February 8, 1955. EXTRA: ORSON WELLES interviews H.G. WELLS.
■ **SF-03 Cassette**

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL. Klaatu comes to earth with a simple message of peace for mankind, or else! With Michael Rennie, Jean Peters, William Conrad. As heard on The Lux Rado Theatre, January 4th, 1954.
■ **SF-10 Cassette**

RADIO YESTERYEAR®
Box C, Sandy Hook, CT 06482 or call
1-800-243-0987

❑ **Zero Hour/Knock**
❑ **The Cold Equasion/Mars is Heaven An Imbalance Of Species**
❑ **The War Of The Worlds**
❑ **The Day The Earth Stood Still**

❑ Any Tape $4.98 ❑ Any 3 Tapes $4.25 each
❑ Any 2 Tapes $4.50 each ❑ Any 4 Tapes $3.99 each

Please add $3.00 shipping and handling, plus applicable sales tax.

Total enclosed $_____

Name_____

Address_____

_____

City_____

State/Zip_____

Dept. 024 AS

_____
Credit Card Number

_____
Signature

_____
Expiration Date

© 1993 Radio Yesteryear

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buggy, the landscape was featureless, smooth. Unmarked. Untouched. Lifeless.

The whole scene was half-lit, like dirty snow under a full moon in winter, only brighter. And more green.

Wu was grinning like a madman. His plastic bag had expanded so that it looked like a space helmet; I realized mine probably looked the same. This made me feel better.

Wu pointed up behind us. I turned and there was the Earth—hanging in the sky like a blue-green, oversized Moon, just like the cover of *The Whole Earth Catalog*. I hadn't actually doubted Wu, but I hadn't actually believed him either, until then. The fifth thing you learn in law school is to be comfortable in that "twilight zone" between belief and doubt.

Now I believed it. We were on the Moon, looking back at the Earth. And it was cold! The gloves did no good at all, even with the wool over the rubber. But there was no time to worry about it. Wu had already picked up the wire mesh wheels and started down the slope, sort of hopping with one under each arm, trying to miss the scattered tires. I followed, dragging the grocery cart behind me. I had expected it to bog down in the dust, but it didn't. The only problem was, the low gravity made it hard for me to keep my footing. I had to wedge my toes under the junk tires and pull it a few feet at a time.

The dune buggy, or LRV, as Wu liked to call it, was about the size of a jeep without a hood (or even an engine). It had two seats side by side, like lawn chairs with plastic webbing, facing a square console the size of a portable TV. Between the seats was a gearshift. There was no steering wheel. An umbrella-shaped antenna attached to the front end made the whole thing look like a contraption out of *E.T.* or *Mary Poppins*.

I picked up the front end, and Wu started putting on the left wheel, fitting it under the round fiberglass fender. Even though the LRV was light, the sudden exertion reminded me that I wasn't breathing, and I felt an instant of panic. I closed my eyes and sucked my tongue until it went away. The bitter taste of the Pond Explorer was reassuring.

When I opened my eyes, it looked like a fog was rolling in: it was my plastic bag, fogging up. I could barely see Wu, already finishing the left wheel. I wondered if he had ever worked on an Indy pit crew. (I found out later that he had.)

Wu crossed to the right wheel. The fog was getting thicker. I tried wiping it off with one hand, but of course, it was on the inside. Wu gave the thumbs up, and I set the front end down. I pointed at my plastic bag, and he nodded. His was fogged up, too. He tossed his wrench into the tool box, and the plastic tray shattered like glass (silently, of course). Must have been the cold. My fingers and toes were killing me.

Wu started hopping up the slope, and I followed. I couldn't see the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Earth overhead, or the Moon below; everything was a blur. I wondered how we would find our way out (or in?), back through the shed door. I needn't have worried. Wu took my hand and led me through, and this time I heard the *pop*. Blinking in the light, we tore the bags off our heads.

Wu spit out his cotton, and I did the same. My first breath felt strange. And wonderful. I had never realized breathing was so much fun.

There was a high-pitched cheer. Several of the neighborhood kids had joined Frankie on the pile of tires.

"Descartes," Wu said.

"We left it in there," I said.

"I mean our location. It's in the lunar highlands, near the equator. Apollo 16. Young, Duke, and Mattingly. 1972. I recognize the battery cover on the LRV. The return was a little hairy, though. Ours, I mean, not theirs. I had to follow the tires the last few yards. We'll spray some WD-40 on the inside of the plastic bags before we go back in."

"Stuff's good for everything," Frankie said.

It was noon, and I was starving, but there was no question of breaking for lunch. Wu was afraid the batteries would freeze; though they were heavy duty, they were made for Earth, not the Moon. With new Pond Explorer and new plastic bags properly treated with WD-40, we went back in. I had also taped plastic bags over my shoes. My toes were still stinging from the cold.

As we went down the slope toward the LRV site, we tossed a few of the tires aside to clear a road. With any luck, we would be coming up soon.

We left the original NASA batteries in place and set the new (well, used, but charged) batteries on top of them, between the front fenders. While Wu hooked them up with the jumper cables, I looked around for what I hoped was the last time. There was no view, just low hills all around, the one in front of us strewn with tires like burnt donuts. The shed door (or adjacentcy, as Wu liked to call it) was a dimly lighted cave under a low cliff at the top of the slope. It wasn't a long hill, but it was steep; about twelve degrees.

I wondered if the umbrella-antenna would make it through the door. As if he had read my mind, Wu was already unbolting it when I turned back around. He tossed it aside with the rest of the junk, sat down, and patted the seat beside him.

I climbed in, or rather "on," since there was no "in" to the LRV. Wu sat, of course, on the left. It occurred to me that if the English had been first on the Moon, he would have been on the right. There was no steering wheel or foot pedals either—but that didn't bother Wu. He seemed to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know exactly what he was doing. He hit a few switches on the console, and dials lighted up for "roll," "heading," "power," etc. With a mad grin toward me, and a "thumbs up" toward the top of the slope (or the Earth hanging above it), he pushed the T-handle between us forward.

The LRV lurched. It groaned—I could "hear" it through my seat and my tailbone—and began to roll slowly forward. I could tell the batteries were weak.

If the LRV had lights, we didn't need them. The Earth, hanging over the adjacentcy like a gigantic pole star, gave plenty of light. The handle I had thought was a gearshift was actually a joystick, like on a video game. Pushing it to one side, Wu turned the LRV sharply to the right—all four wheels turned—and started up the slope.

It was slow going. You might think the Earth would have looked friendly, but it didn't. It looked cold and cruel; it seemed to be mocking us. The batteries, which had started out weak, were getting weaker. Wu's smile was gone already. The path we had cleared through the tires was useless; the LRV would never make it straight up the slope.

I climbed down and began clearing an angled switchback. If pulling things on the Moon is hard, throwing them is almost fun. I hopped from tire to tire, slinging them down the hill, while Wu drove behind me.

The problem was, even on a switchback the corners are steep. The LRV was still twenty yards from the top when the batteries gave out entirely. I didn't hear it, of course; but when I looked back after clearing the last stretch, I saw it was stopped. Wu was banging on the joystick with both hands. His plastic bag was swollen, and I was afraid it would burst. I had never seen Wu lose it before. It alarmed me. I ran (or rather, hopped) back to help out.

I started unhooking the jumper cables. Wu stopped banging on the joystick and helped. The supermarket cart had been left at the bottom, but the batteries were light enough in the lunar gravity. I picked up one under each arm and started up the hill. I didn't bother to look back, because I knew Wu would be following with the other one.

We burst through the adjacentcy—the shed door—together; we tore the plastic bags off our heads and spit out the cotton balls. Warm air flooded my lungs. It felt wonderful. But my toes and fingers were on fire.

"Damn and Hell!" Wu said. I had never heard him curse before. "We almost made it!"

"We can still make it," I said. "We only lack a few feet. Let's put these babies on the charger and get some pizza."

"Good idea," Wu said. He was calming down. "I have a tendency to lose it when I'm hungry. But look, Irv. Our problems are worse than we thought."

I groaned. Two of the batteries had split along the sides when we had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

set them down. All three were empty; the acid had boiled away in the vacuum of the Moon. It was a wonder they had worked at all.

"Meanwhile, are your toes hurting?" Wu asked.

"My toes are killing me," I said.

The sixth thing you learn in law school is that cash solves all (or almost all) problems. I had one last hundred dollar bill hidden in my wallet for emergencies—and if this didn't qualify, what did? We gave the old man ninety for three more batteries, and put them on fast charge. Then we sent our change (ten bucks) with one of the kids on a bike, for four slices of pizza and two cans of diet soda.

Then we sat down under an ailanthus and took off our shoes. I was pleased to see that my toes weren't black. They warmed fairly quickly in the sun. It was my shoes that were cold. The tassel on one of my loafers was broken; the other one snapped when I touched it.

"I'm going to have to bypass some of the electrics on the LRV if we're going to make it up the hill," said Wu. He grabbed a piece of newspaper that was blowing by and began to trace a diagram. "According to my calculations, those batteries will put out 33.9 percent power for sixteen minutes if we drop out the nav system. Or maybe shunt past the rear steering motors. Look at this—"

"I'll take your word for it," I said. "Here's our pizza."

My socks were warm. I taped two plastic bags over my feet this time, while Wu poured the Pond Explorer over the cotton balls. It steamed when it went on, and a cheer went up from the kids on the pile of tires. There were ten or twelve of them now. Frankie was charging them a quarter apiece. Wu paused before putting the cotton ball under his tongue.

"Kids," he said, "Don't try this at home!"

They all hooted. Wu taped the plastic bag over my head, then over his. We waved—we were neighborhood heroes!—and picked up the "new" batteries, which were now charged; and ducked side by side back through the adjacentcy to the junk-strewn lunar slope where our work still waited to be finished. We were the first interplanetary automotive salvage team!

Wu was carrying two batteries this time, and I was carrying one. We didn't stop to admire the scenery. I was already sick of the Moon. Wu hooked up the batteries while I got into the passenger seat. He got in beside me and hit a few switches, fewer this time. The "heading" lights on the console didn't come on. Half the steering and drive enable switches remained unlighted.

Then Wu put my left hand on the joystick, and jumped down and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grabbed the back of the LRV, indicating that he was going to push. I was going to drive.

I pushed the joystick forward and the LRV groaned into action, a little livelier than last time. The steering was slow; only the front wheels turned. I was hopeful, though. The LRV groaned through the last curve without slowing down.

I headed up the last straightaway, feeling the batteries weaken with every yard, every foot, every inch. It was as if the weight that had been subtracted from everything else on the Moon had been added to the LRV and was dragging it down. The lights on the console were flickering.

We were only ten yards from the adjacentcy. It was a dim slot under the cliff; I knew it was bright on the other side (a midsummer afternoon!) but apparently the same interface that kept the air from leaking through also dimmed the light.

It looked barely wide enough. But low. I was glad the LRV didn't have a windshield. I would have to duck to make it through.

Fifteen feet from the opening. Ten. Eight. The LRV stopped. I jammed the joystick forward and it moved another foot. I reached back over the seat and jiggled the jumper cables. The LRV groaned forward another six inches—then died. I looked at the slot under the cliff just ahead, and at the Earth overhead, both equally far away.

I wiggled the joystick. Nothing. I started to get down to help push, but Wu stopped me. He had one more trick. He unhooked the batteries and reversed their order. It shouldn't have made any difference, but as I have often noticed, electrical matters are not logical, like law: things that shouldn't work, often do.

I jammed the joystick all the way forward again.

The LRV groaned forward again, and groaned on. I pointed it into the slot and ducked. I saw a shimmering light and I felt the machine shudder. The front of the LRV poked through the shower curtain into the sunlight, and I followed, the sudden heat making my plastic bag swell.

The batteries groaned their last. I jumped down and began to pull on the front bumper. Through the plastic bag I could hear the kids screaming; or were they cheering? There was a loud crackling sound from behind the shower curtain. The LRV was only halfway through, and the front end was jumping up and down.

I tore the bag off my head and spit out the cotton and took a deep breath and yelled: "Wu!"

I heard a hiss and a crackling; I could feel the ground shake under my feet. The pile of tires was slowly collapsing behind me; kids were slipping and sliding, trying to get away. I could hear glass breaking somewhere. I yelled, "Wu!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The front of the LRV suddenly pulled free, throwing me (not to put too fine a point on it) flat on my ass.

The ground stopped shaking. The kids cheered.

Only the front of the LRV had come through. It was burned in half right behind the seat; cut through as if by a sloppy welder. The sour smell of electrical smoke was in the air. I took a deep breath and ducked toward the curtain, after Wu. But there was no curtain there, and no shed—only a pile of loose boards.

"Wu!" I yelled. But there he was, lying on the ground among the boards. He sat up and tore the bag off his head. He spit out his cotton and took a deep breath—and looked around and groaned.

The kids were all standing and cheering. (Kids love destruction.) Even Frankie looked pleased. But the old man wasn't; he came around the corner of the garage, looking fierce. "What the Hell's going on here?" he asked. "What happened to my shed?"

"Good question," said Wu. He stood up and started tossing aside the boards that had been the shed. The shower curtain was under them, melted into a stiff plastic rag. Under it was a pile of ash and cinders—and that was all. No cave, no hole; no rear end of the LRV. No Moon.

"The cave gets bigger and smaller every month," said Frankie. "But it never did that, not since it first showed up."

"When was that?" asked Wu.

"About six months ago."

"What about my jumper cables?" said the old man.

We paid him for the jumper cables with the change from the pizza, then called a wrecker to tow our half-LRV back to Park Slope. While we were waiting for the wrecker, I pulled Wu aside. "I hope we didn't put them out of business," I said. I'm no bleeding heart liberal, but I was concerned.

"No, no," he said. "The adjacentcy was about to drop into a lower neotopological orbit. We just helped it along a little. It's hard to figure without an almanac, but according to the tide table for August (which I'm glad now I bothered to memorize) the adjacentcy won't be here next month. Or the month after. It was just here for six months, like Frankie said. It was a temporary thing, cyclical as well as periodic."

"Sort of like the Ice Ages."

"Exactly. It always occurs somewhere in this hemisphere, but usually not in such a convenient location. It could be at the bottom of Lake Huron. Or in mid-air over the Great Plains, as one of those unexplained air bumps."

"What about the other side of it?" I asked. "Is it always a landing site? Or was that just a coincidence?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Good question!" Wu picked up one of the paper plates left over from the pizza and started scrawling on it with a pencil stub. "If I take the mean lunar latitude of all six Apollo sites, and divide by the coefficient of . . . "

"It was just curiosity," I said. "Here's the wrecker."

Five

We got the half-LRV towed for half-price (I did the negotiating) but we never did make our million dollars. Boeing was in Chapter Eleven; NASA was under a procurement freeze; the Air & Space Museum wasn't interested in anything that rolled.

"Maybe I should take it on the road," Wu told me after several weeks of trying. "I could be a shopping center attraction: 'Half a Chinaman exhibits half a Lunar Roving Vehicle. Kids and adults half price.' "

Wu's humor masked bitter disappointment. But he kept trying. The JPL (Jet Propulsion Laboratory) wouldn't accept his calls. General Motors wouldn't return them. Finally, the Huntsville Parks Department, which was considering putting together an Apollo Memorial, agreed to send their Assistant Administrator for Adult Recreation to have a look.

She arrived on the day my divorce became final. Wu and I met her in the garage, where I had been living while Diane and I were waiting to sell the house. Her eyes were big and blue-green, like Frankie's. She measured the LRV and shook her head. "It's like a dollar bill," she said.

"How's that?" Wu asked. He looked depressed. Or maybe skeptical. It was getting hard to tell the difference.

"If you have over half, it's worth a whole dollar. If you have less than half it's worth nothing. You have slightly less than half of the LRV here, which means that it is worthless. What'll you take for that old P1800, though? Isn't that the one that was assembled in England?"

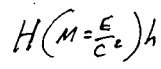
Which is how I met Candy. But that's another story.

We closed on the house two days later. Since the garage went with it, I helped Wu move the half-LRV to his back yard, where it sits to this day. It was lighter than any motorcycle. We moved the P1800 (which had plates) onto the street, and on Saturday morning, I went to get the interior for it. Just as Wu had predicted, the Hole was easy to find now that it was no longer linked with the adjacentcy. I didn't even have to stop at Boulevard Imports. I just turned off Conduit onto a likely looking street, and there I was.

The old man would hardly speak to me, but Frankie was understanding. "Your partner came out and explained it all," he said. He showed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me a yellow legal pad covered with figures. "He gave me this to explain it more, I guess."



Frankie had stacked the boards of the shed against the garage. There was a cindery bare spot where the shed door had been; the cinders had that sour Moon smell. "I was sick and tired of the tire disposalment business, anyway," Frankie confided in a whisper.

The old man came around the corner of the garage. "What happened to your buddy?" he asked.

"He's going to school on Saturday mornings," I said. Wu was studying to be a meteorologist. I was never sure if that was weather or shooting stars. Anyway, he had quit the law.

"Good riddance," said the old man.

The old man charged me sixty-five dollars for the interior panels, knobs, handles, and trim. I had no choice but to pay up. I had the money, since I had sold Diane my half of the furniture. I was ready to start my new life. I didn't want to own anything that wouldn't fit into the tiny, heart-shaped trunk of the P1800. That night Wu helped me put in the seats and then the panels and knobs and handles. We finished at midnight and it didn't look bad, even though I knew the colors would look weird in the daylight—blue and white in a red car. Wu was grinning that mad grin again; it was the first time I had seen it since the Moon. He pointed over the rooftops to the east (toward Howard Beach, as a matter of fact). The Moon was rising. I was glad to see it looking so—far away.

Wu's wife brought us some leftover wedding cake. I gave him the keys to the 145 and he gave me the keys to the P1800. "Guess we're about even," I said. I put out my hand but Wu slapped it aside and gave me a hug instead, lifting me off the ground. Everybody should have a friend like Wilson Wu.

I followed the full Moon all the way to Alabama. ●

—Special thanks to Pat Molloy.

Customer Service or Subscriber Assistance: Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to: Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 5130, Harlan, IA 51593-5130 or call 1-(800)-333-4108.

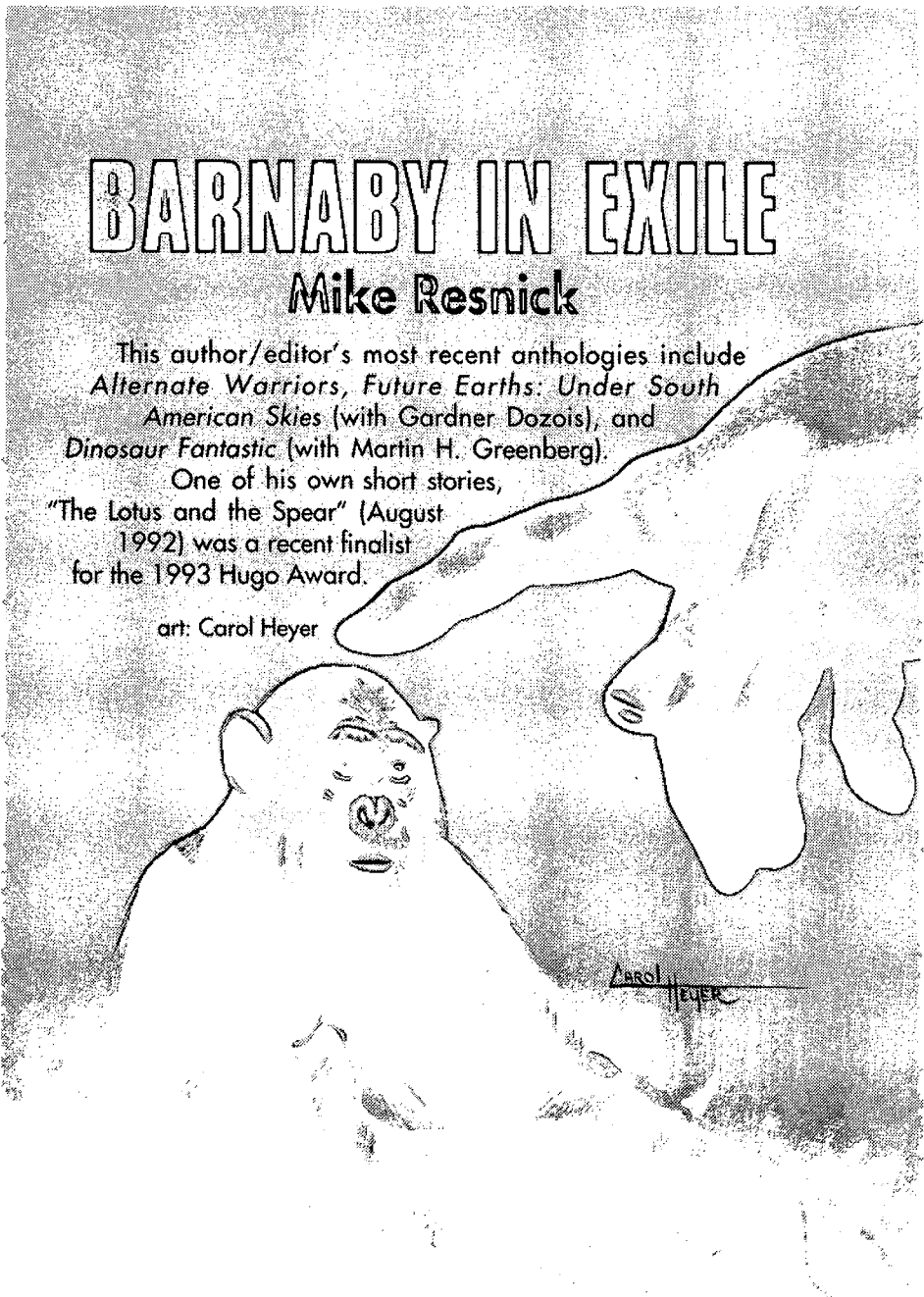
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BARNABY IN EXILE

Mike Resnick

This author/editor's most recent anthologies include *Alternate Warriors*, *Future Earths: Under South American Skies* (with Gardner Dozois), and *Dinosaur Fantastic* (with Martin H. Greenberg). One of his own short stories, "The Lotus and the Spear" (August 1992) was a recent finalist for the 1993 Hugo Award.

art: Carol Heyer



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Barnaby sits in his cage, waiting for Sally to come into the lab.

She will give him the puzzle, the same one he worked on yesterday. But today he will not disappoint her. He has been thinking about the puzzle all night. Thinking is fun. Today he will do it right, and she will laugh and tell him how smart he is. He will lay on his back and she will tickle his stomach, and say, "Oh, what a bright young fellow you are, Barnaby!" Then Barnaby will make a funny face and turn a somersault.

Barnaby is me.

It gets lonely after Sally leaves. Bud comes when it is black and cleans my cage, but he never talks. Sometimes he forgets and leaves the light on. Then I try to talk to Roger and his family, but they are just rabbits and cannot make the signs. I don't think they are very smart, anyway.

Every night when Bud comes in I sit up and smile at him. I always make the sign for "Hello," but he doesn't answer. Sometimes I think Bud isn't any smarter than Roger. He just pats me on the head. Sometimes he leaves the pictures on after is finished.

My favorite pictures are Fred and Barney. Everything is so bright and fast. Many times I ask Sally to bring Dino to the lab so that I can play with him, but she never does. I like Barney, because he is not as big or loud as Fred, and I am not big or loud either. Also, my name is Barnaby and that is like Barney. Sometimes, when it is black and I am all alone, I imagine that I am Barney, and that I don't sleep in a cage at all.

This day it was white out, and Sally even had white on her when she came to the lab, but it all turned to water.

Today we had a new toy. It looks like the thing on Doctor's desk, with lots of little things that look like flat grapes. Sally told me that she would show me something and then I should touch the grape that had the same picture on it. She showed me a shoe, and a ball, and an egg, and a star, and a square.

I did the egg and the ball wrong, but tomorrow I will do them right. I think more every day. Like Sally says, I am a very bright young fellow.

We have spent many days with the new toy, and now I can speak to Sally with it, just by touching the right grapes.

She will come into the lab and say, "How are you this morning, Barnaby?" and I will touch the grapes that say, "Barnaby is fine" or "Barnaby is hungry."

What I really want to say is "Barnaby is lonely" but there is no grape for lonely.

Today I touch the grapes that say "Barnaby wants out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Out of your cage?" she asks.
"Out there," I sign. "Out in the white."
"You would not like it."
"I do not like the black when I am alone," I sign. "I will like the white."
"It is very cold," she says, "and you are not used to it."
"The white is very pretty," I say. "Barnaby wants out."
"The last time I let you out you hurt Roger," she reminds me.
"I just wanted to touch him," I say.
"You do not know your own strength," she says. "Roger is just a rabbit, and you hurt him."
"I will be gentle this time," I say.
"I thought you didn't like Roger," she says.
"I don't like Roger," I say. "I like touching."
She reaches into the cage and tickles my belly and scratches my back and I feel better, but then she stops.
"It is time for your lesson," she says.
"If I do it right, can you bring me something to touch?" I ask.
"What kind of thing?" she says.
I think for a moment. "Another Barnaby," I say.
She looks sad, and doesn't answer.

One day Sally brings me a book filled with pictures. I smell it and taste it. Finally I figure out that she wants me to look at it.
There are all kinds of animals in it. I see one that looks like Roger, but it is brown and Roger is white. And there is a kitten, like I see through the window. And a dog, like Doctor sometimes brings to the lab. But there is no Dino.
Then I see a picture of a boy. His hair is shorter than Sally's, and not as gray as Doctor's, or as yellow as Bud's. But he is smiling, and I know he must have many things to touch.

When Sally comes back the next morning, I have lots of questions about the pictures. But before I can ask her, she asks me.
"What is this?" she says, holding up a picture.
"Roger," I say.
"No," she says. "Roger is a name. What is this animal called?"
I try to remember. "Rabbit," I say at last.
"Very good, Barnaby," she says. "And what is this?"
"Kitten," I say.
We got through the whole book.
"Where is Barnaby?" I ask.
"Barnaby is an ape," she says. "There is no picture of an ape in the book."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wonder if there are any other Barnabys in the world, and if they are lonely too.

Later I ask, "Do I have a father and a mother?"

"Of course you do," says Sally. "Everything has a father and a mother."

"Where are they?" I ask.

"Your father is dead," says Sally. "Your mother is in a zoo far away from here."

"Barnaby wants to see his mother," I say.

"I'm afraid not, Barnaby."

"Why?"

"She wouldn't know you. She has forgotten you, just as you have forgotten her."

"If I could see her, I would say 'I'm Barnaby,' and then she would know me."

Sally shakes her head. "She wouldn't understand. You are very special; she is not. She can't sign, and she can't use a computer."

"Does she have any other Barnabys?" I ask.

"I don't know," says Sally. "I suppose so."

"How does she speak to them?"

"She doesn't."

I think about this for a long time.

Finally I say, "But she touches them."

"Yes, she touches them," says Sally.

"They must be very happy," I say.

Today I will find out more about being Barnaby.

"Good morning," says Sally when she comes into the lab. "How are you today, Barnaby?"

"What is a zoo?" I ask.

"A zoo is a place where animals live," says Sally.

"Can I see a zoo through the window?"

"No. It is very far away."

I think about my next question for a long time. "Are Barnabys animals?"

"Yes."

"Are Sallys animals?"

"In a way, yes."

"Does Sally's mother live in a zoo?"

Sally laughs. "No," she says.

"Does she live in a cage?"

"No," says Sally.

I think for awhile.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sally's mother is dead," I say.

"No, she is alive."

I get very upset, because I do not know how to ask why Sally's mother is different from Barnaby's mother, and the harder I try the worse I do it, and Sally cannot understand me. Finally I start hitting the floor with my fist. Roger and his family all jump, and Doctor opens the door. Sally gives me a little toy that squeaks when I hit it, and very soon I forget to be mad and start playing with the toy. Sally says something to Doctor, and he smiles and leaves.

"Do you want to ask anything else before we begin our lesson?" asks Sally.

"Why?" I ask.

"Why what?"

"Why is Barnaby an ape and Sally a man?"

"Because that is the way God made us," she says.

I start getting very excited, because I think I am very close to learning more about Barnabys.

"Who is God?" I ask.

She tries to answer, but I do not understand again.

When it gets black and I am all alone except for Roger and his family, and Bud has already cleaned my cage, I sit and think about God. Thinking can be very interesting.

If he made Sally and he made me, why didn't he make me as smart as Sally? Why can she talk, and do things with her hands that I can't do?

It is very confusing. I decide that I must meet God and ask him why he does these things, and why he forgot that even Barnabys like to be touched.

As soon as Sally comes into the lab, I ask her, "Where does God live?"

"In heaven."

"Is heaven far away?"

"Yes."

"Farther than a zoo?" I ask.

"Much farther."

"Does God ever come to the lab?"

She laughs. "No. Why?"

"I have many questions to ask him."

"Perhaps I can answer some of them," she says.

"Why am I alone?"

"Because you are very special," says Sally.

"If I was not special, would I be with other Barnabys?"

"Yes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dell Magazines Presents A New 1994 CALENDAR...

DINOSAURS

AND OTHER PREHISTORIC REPTILES

Recreate the fearsome world of the dinosaurs through the paintings of Robert F. Walters in this 1994 calendar. Vivid images bring prehistoric habitats alive with dinosaurs fighting for survival from the snow-covered steppes to lush tropical rainforests. 12 paintings with detailed captions.

Order your exciting Dinosaur calendar today, be transported to prehistoric times tomorrow.

Just $10.99 for each calendar plus $2.95 Delivery Charge (.50 shipping for each additional calendar).

Sterling Specialties
P.O. Box 6105, Dept. 024 AS
Novato, CA 94948-6105
1-800-365-YEAR

Please make checks or money orders payable to Sterling Specialties, or you can charge to VISA or MasterCard.

YES! Send me _____
DINOSAUR Calendars at $10.99 each.
Please include $2.95 delivery and
8.25% Sales Tax for CA Residents.
Total enclosed $ _____

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State/Zip _____
Credit Card # _____ Expiration Date _____
Signature _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I have never hurt God," I say. "Why has God made me special?"

The next morning I ask her to tell me about the other Barnabys.

"Barnaby is just a name," explains Sally. "There are other apes, but I don't know if any of them are named Barnaby."

"What is a name?"

"A name is what makes you different from everything else."

"If my name was Fred or Dino, could I be like everyone else?" I ask.

"No," she says. "You are special. You are Barnaby the Bonobo. You are very famous."

"What is famous?"

"Many people know who you are."

"What are People?" I ask.

"Men and women."

"Are there more than you and Doctor and Bud?"

"Yes."

Then it is time for my lessons, but I do them very badly, because I am still thinking about a world that has more People in it than Sally and Doctor and Bud. I am so busy wondering who lets them out of their cages when the dark goes away that I forget all about God and don't think about him any more for many days.

I hear Sally talking to Doctor, but I do not understand what they are saying.

Doctor keeps repeating that we don't have any more fun, and Sally keeps saying that Barnaby is special, and then they both say a lot of things I can't understand.

When they are through, and Doctor leaves, I ask Sally why we can't have fun any more.

"Fun?" she repeats. "What do you mean?"

"Doctor says there will be no more fun."

She stares at me for a long time. "You understood what he said?"

"Why can't we have any fun?" I repeat.

"Fund," she says. "The word was *fund*. It means something different."

"Then Barnaby and Sally can still have fun?" I ask.

"Of course we can."

I lay on my back and sign to her. "Tickle me."

She reaches into the cage and tickles me, but I see water in her eyes. Human People make water in their eyes when they are unhappy. I pretend to bite her hand and then race around my cage like I did when I was a baby, but this time it doesn't make her laugh.

I hear voices coming from behind the door. It is Sally and Doctor again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, we can't put him in a zoo," says Doctor. "If he starts signing to the spectators, they'd have a million people demanding his freedom by the end of the month, and then what would happen? What would become of him? Can you picture the poor bastard in a circus?"

"We can't destroy him just because he's too bright," says Sally.

"Who will take him? *You?*" says Doctor. "He's only eight now. What happens when he becomes sexually mature, when he is a surly adult male? It's not that far away. He could rip you apart in seconds."

"He won't—not Barnaby."

"Will your landlord let you keep him? Are you willing to sacrifice the next twenty years of your life caring for him?"

"We might get renewed funding as early as this fall," says Sally.

"Be realistic," says Doctor. "It'll be years, if ever. This program is being duplicated at half a dozen labs around the country, and some of them are much farther along. Barnaby's not the only ape that has learned to use articles and adjectives, you know. There's a twenty-five-year-old gorilla, and three other Bonobo chimps that are well into their teens. There's no reason to believe that anyone will restore our funding."

"But he's *different,*" says Sally. "He asks abstract questions."

"I know, I know . . . once he asked you who God was. But I studied the tape, and you mentioned God first. If you mention Michael Jordan and he asks who that is, it doesn't mean that he's developed an abiding interest in basketball."

"Can I at least talk to the committee? Show them videotapes of him?"

"They know what a chimpanzee looks like," says Doctor.

"But they don't know what one *thinks* like," says Sally. "Perhaps this will help to convince them. . . . "

"It's not a matter of convincing them," says Doctor. "The funds have dried up. Every program is hurting these days."

"Please . . . "

"All right," says Doctor. "I'll set up a meeting. But it won't do any good."

I hear it all, but I do not understand any of it. Before it got white today I dreamed of a place filled with Barnabys, and I am sitting in a corner, my eyes shut, trying to remember it before it all drifts away.

We keep doing the lessons each day, but I can tell that Sally is unhappy, and I wonder what I have done to upset her.

This morning Sally opens my cage door and just hugs me for a long time.

"I have to talk to you, Barnaby," she says, and I see her eyes are making water again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I touch the grapes that say, "Barnaby likes to talk."

"This is important," she says. "Tomorrow you will leave the lab."

"Will I go outside?" I ask.

"You will go very far away."

"To a zoo?"

"Farther."

Suddenly I remember God.

"Will I go to heaven?" I ask.

She smiles even as her eyes make more water. "Not quite that far," she says. "You are going to a place where there are no labs and no cages. You will be free, Barnaby."

"Are there other Barnabys there?"

"Yes," she says. "There are other Barnabys there."

"Doctor was wrong," I say. "There will be more fun for Sally and Barnaby."

"I cannot go with you," she says.

"Why?"

"I have to stay here. This is my home."

"If you are good, maybe God will let you out of your cage," I say.

She makes a funny sound and hugs me again.

They put me in a smaller cage, one with no light in it. For two days I smell bad things. Most of my water spills, and there are loud noises that hurt my ears. Sometimes People talk, and once a man who is not Bud or Doctor gives me food and more water. He does it through a little hole in the top of the cage.

I touch his hand to show him that I am not angry. He screams and pulls his hand away.

I keep signing, "Barnaby is lonely," but it is dark and there is no one to see.

I do not like my new world.

On the third morning they move my crate, and then they move it again. Finally they lift it up and carry it, and when they set it down I can smell many things I have never smelled before.

They open the door, and I step out onto the grass. The sun is very bright, and I squint and look at People who are not Sally or Doctor or Bud.

"You're home, boy," says one of them.

I look around. The world is a much bigger place than the lab, and I am frightened.

"Go on, fella," says another. "Sniff around. Get used to the place."

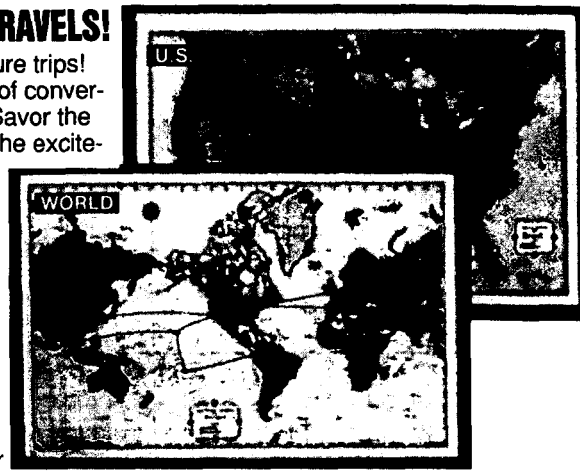
I sniff around. I do not get used to the place.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHART YOUR TRAVELS!

Record past & future trips! Stimulate a world of conversational interest. Savor the memories. Enjoy the excitement of planning your travels! Excellent for reference and charting business territories.

All maps are in full color, framed and come with charting kit including map pins, charting ruler and marking pen.



THREE SIZES AVAILABLE

STANDARD 30" x 20" printed on heavy artcraft stock. Framed in rich walnut finish wood. Ready to hang.
World or U.S. **$38.00**
(2 or more $35.00 each)

DELUXE 33" x 22" map laminated with thick 10-mil Poly-Mylar™ film. Surface can be wiped clean. Framed in rich walnut finish wood. Ready to hang.
World or U.S. **$49.50**
(2 or more $45.00 each)

KINGSIZE 52" x 34" map laminated with thick 10-mil Poly-Mylar™ film. Surface can be wiped clean. Framed in gold anodized aluminum. Easy to assemble.
World or U.S. **$99.50**
(2 or more $95.00 each)

PERSONALIZED: Name hand lettered add $5 ea.
ADD $5 FOR SHIPPING & HANDLING

VISA, M/C phone orders

1-800-322-1866

In California (213) 965-9380

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

THE CHART HOUSE TRAVEL MAP CO., INC.
5222 Venice Blvd., L.A., CA 90019 Dept. DPI

☐ Standard ☐ Deluxe ☐ Kingsize
☐ World ☐ U.S. ☐ World ☐ U.S. ☐ World ☐ U.S.

Send _____ maps $_____ Total.

☐ VISA ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ Check enclosed

Card #_____ Exp. _____

Name_____

Address_____

City, State, Zip_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I spend many days in the world. I get to know all the trees and bushes, and the big fence around it. They feed me fruits and leaves and bark. I am not used to them, and for a while I am sick, but then I get better.

I hear many noises from beyond the world—screams and growls and shrieks. I smell many strange animals. But I do not hear or smell any Barnabys.

Then one day the People put me back in my crate, and I am alone for a long time, and then they open the crate, and I am no longer in the world, but in a place with so many trees that I almost cannot see the sky.

"Okay, fella," says a Person. "Off into the forest with you now."

He makes a motion with his hands, but it is a sign I do not recognize.

I sign back: "Barnaby is afraid."

The Person pets me on the head. It is the first time anyone has touched me since I left the lab.

"Have a good life," he says, "and make lots of little Barnabys."

Then he climbs into his cage, and it rolls away from me. I try to follow it, but it is much too fast, and soon I can no longer see it.

I look back at the forest and hear strange sounds, and a breeze brings me the sweet smell of fruit.

There is no one around to see me, but I sign "Barnaby is free" anyway.

Barnaby is free.

Barnaby is lonely.

Barnaby is frightened.

I learn to find water, and to climb trees. I see little Barnabys with tails that chatter at me, but they cannot sign, and I see big kittens with spots, and they make terrible noises and I hide from them.

I wish I could hide in my cage, where I was always safe.

Today when the black goes away I wake up and go to the water, and I find another Barnaby.

"Hello," I sign. "I am a Barnaby too."

The other Barnaby growls at me.

"Do you live in a lab?" I ask. "Where is your cage?"

The other Barnaby runs at me and starts biting me. I shriek and roll on the ground.

"What have I done?" I ask.

The other Barnaby runs at me again, and I screech and climb to the top of a tree. He sits at the bottom and stares at me all day until the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

black returns. It gets very cold, and then wet, and I shiver all night and wish Sally were here.

In the morning the Barnaby is gone, and I climb down to the ground. I smell where he has been, and I follow his scent, because I do not know what else to do. Finally I come to a place with more Barnabys than I ever imagined there could be. Then I remember that Sally taught me counting, and I count. There are twenty-three of them.

One of them sees me and screams, and before I can make any signs all of them charge at me and I run away. They chase me for a long time, but finally they stop, and I am alone again.

I am alone for many days. I do not go back to the Barnabys, because they would hurt me if they could. I do not know what I have done to make them mad, so I do not know how to stop doing it.

I have learned to smell the big kittens when they are still far away, and to climb the trees so they cannot catch me, and I have learned to hide from the dogs that laugh like Sally does when I make somersaults, but I am so lonely, and I miss talking, and I am already forgetting some of the signs Sally taught me.

Last night I dreamed about Fred and Wilma and Barney and Dino, and when I woke up my own eyes were making water.

I hear sounds in the morning. Not sounds like the big kittens or the dogs make, but strange, clumsy sounds. I go to see what is making them.

In a little clearing I see four People—two men and two women—and they have brought little brown cages. The cages are not as nice as my old cage, because you cannot see in or out of them.

One of the men has made a fire, and they are sitting on chairs around it. I want to approach them, but I have learned my lesson with the Barnabys, and so I wait until one of the men sees me.

When he doesn't yell or chase me, I sign to him.

"I am Barnaby."

"What has it got in its hands?" asks one of the women.

"Nothing," says a man.

"Barnaby wants to be friends," I sign.

A woman puts something up in front of her face, and suddenly there is a big *pop!* It is so bright that I can't see. I rub my eyes and walk forward.

"Don't let him get too close," says the other man. "No telling what kind of diseases he's carrying."

"Will you talk with Barnaby?" I ask.

The first man picks up a rock and throws it at me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Shoo!" he yells. "Go away!"

He throws another rock, and I run back into the forest.

When it is black out, and they sit around the fire, I sneak as close as I can get, and lay down and listen to the sounds of their voices, and pretend I am back in the lab.

In the morning they throw rocks at me until I go away.

And then one day, after they throw the rocks at me and I go for water, I come back and find that they are gone. They were not very good friends, but they were the only ones I had.

What will I do now?

Finally, after many days, I find a single Barnaby, and it is a female. She has terrible scars on her from other Barnabys, and when she sees me she bares her teeth and growls. I sit still and hope that she will not go away.

After a long time she comes closer to me. I am afraid to move, because I do not want to frighten her or make her mad. I ignore her and stare off into the trees.

Finally she reaches out and picks an insect off my shoulder and puts it into her mouth, and soon she is sitting beside me, eating the flowers and leaves that have fallen to the ground.

Finally, when I am sure she will not run away, I sign to her, "I am Barnaby."

She grabs at my hands as if I was playing with a fruit or an insect, then shows her teeth when she sees that I am not holding anything.

She is really not any smarter than Roger, but at least she does not run away from me.

I will call her Sally.

Sally is afraid of the other Barnabys, so we live at the edge of the forest, where they hardly ever come. She touches me, and that is very nice, but I find that I miss talking and thinking even more.

Every day I try to teach her to sign, but she cannot learn. We have three baby Barnabys, one after each rainy season, but they are no smarter than Sally, and besides I have forgotten most of the signs.

More and more People come to the forest in their brown cages. My family is afraid of them, but I love talking and listening and thinking more than anything. I always visit their camps at night, and listen to their voices in the darkness, and try to understand the words. I pretend

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I am back in the lab, though it is harder and harder to remember what the lab is like.

Each time there are new People I show myself and say "I am Barnaby," but none of them ever answers. When one finally does, I will know that he is God.

There were many things I wanted to ask him once, but I cannot remember most of them. I will tell him to be nice to Sally and the other two People at the lab—I forget their names—because what has happened to me is not their fault.

I will not ask him why he hated me so much that he made me special, or why People and Barnabys always chase me away. I will just say, "Please talk to Barnaby," and then I will ask if we can do a lesson.

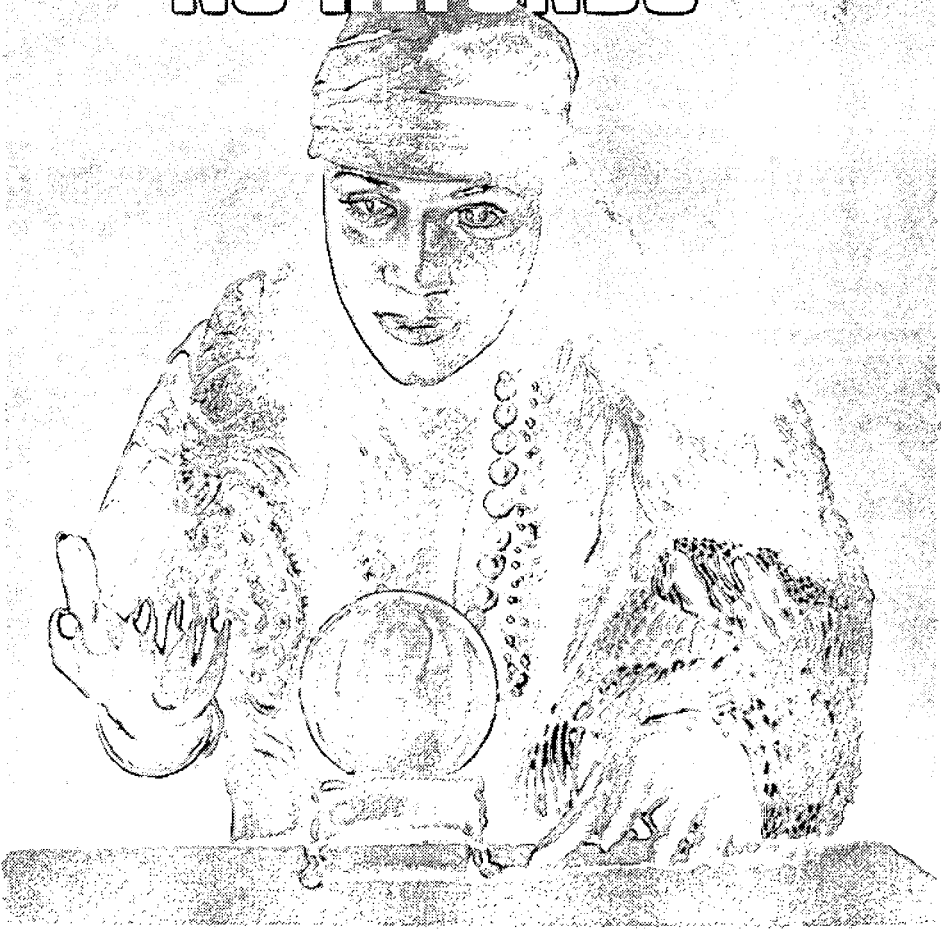
Once, when I was a very bright fellow, there were many things I wanted to discuss with him. But now that I have left the world, that will be enough. ●

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685) 1A. Title of Publication: Asimov's Science Fiction. 1B. Publication No. 522-310. 2. Date of Filing: September 27, 1993. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 days with special issues in April and November; 3A. No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; 3B. Annual Subscription Price: $39.97. 4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not Printer): 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. 5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters of General Business Offices of the Publisher (Not Printer): 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. 6. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Christoph Haas-Heye, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036; Editor: Gardner Dozois, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036; Managing Editor: Sheila Williams, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. 7. Owner: Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036 8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: NONE. 10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: (A) Total No. Copies (Net Press Run): 115,700; (B) Paid and/or Requested Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 9,000; (2) Mail Subscription: 64,000; (C) Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 73,000; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means; Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 300; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 73,300; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 2,400; (2) Returns from News Agents: 40,000; (G) TOTAL (Sum of E, F1 and 2 - should equal net press run shown in A): 115,700. Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total No. Copies (Net Press Run): 132,800; (B) Paid and/or Requested Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 11,000; (2) Mail Subscription: 65,000; (C) Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 76,000; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means; Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 300; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 76,300; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 1,500; (2) Returns from News Agents: 55,000; (G) TOTAL (Sum of E, F1 and 2 - should equal net press run shown in A): 132,800. 11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Christoph Haas-Heye
Publisher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NO REFUNDS



Phyllis Eisenstein

Phyllis Eisenstein has been writing professionally since 1971, both on her own and in collaboration with her husband Alex. She has published six novels, including *In the Red Lord's Reach*, and some two dozen shorter works. The author has been nominated twice each for the Hugo and Nebula awards, and her novel, *Born to Exile*, won the Balrog Award for fantasy. Ms. Eisenstein has taught science fiction writing at Clarion and more than a dozen other schools and workshops. She currently teaches at Columbia College of Chicago.

—Steve Cavello

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She knew he was a junkie before he opened the door. She knew that he lived on the street, cadging change from strangers, eating out of garbage cans, shooting up with people who were his friends when they had the junk and his competition for returnable bottles the rest of the time. She knew because *knowing* was what she was, and what she purveyed—knowing what had been, what was, what would be. The small sign in the curtained plate glass window said *Reader and Adviser,* but that was only because the police would arrest anyone who bluntly claimed to tell fortunes.

The junkie opened the door, and the little bell above his head jangled to announce him.

"Madame Catherine?" he said in a hoarse, uncertain voice. He squinted toward the drapery of beads that half-obscured the rear two-thirds of the narrow room.

She waited a moment, letting him take in her carefully cultivated ambience—the floor covered with worn, grayed-out tiles; the walls and ceiling festooned with dusty silks and velvets; the small table draped with faded satin, the pitted crystal ball sitting on a brass pedestal at its center; the gypsy fortune teller swathed in skirts and scarves and junk jewelry. This was the decor she kept going back to, far better than the wood-paneled high-rise office and the chic suit, or the black-and-white New Age studio and the designer jeans. Clients came most readily to this shabby storefront, their basest carnival expectations confirmed by it. The right kinds of clients.

She raised a hand toward the junkie. "Come in, Steven," she said.

He pushed a few strings of beads aside and leaned into the inner sanctum. "You know my name."

"Of course." Finding his name among the myriad voices he had heard in his life hardly took any effort at all. His mother had used it, his father, his friends, his wife, a vast, echoing chorus of *Steven.* Catherine gestured toward the overstuffed chair on the far side of the table. "Won't you sit down?"

He hesitated another moment, then slipped sideways through the beads and slowly limped to the chair. He dropped to its worn cushions and sat there in silence, his head, his whole body, drooping. He was painfully thin, the skull visible behind the papery skin of his face, the cheeks deeply hollowed above a short straggling beard, the sunken eyes rimmed with dark circles. Multiple layers of clothing partly camouflaged his frailty, hanging slack at shoulder and hip, so that he looked a little like a child trying on an older brother's discards; but above his shirt and sweater collars, every cord of his neck was visible, and his Adam's apple stood out like a half-swallowed peach pit. And he stank of sweat and rotten teeth, with a sharp overtone of bleach.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had cleaned a needle with that bleach an hour ago, she knew. Volunteers from the local settlement house had been showing the junkies how to do it, to protect themselves from AIDS. Too late for Steven, of course—she saw that the doctors had told him so weeks ago—but there was kindness in his doing it for others. He had not lost his humanity on the street, along with everything else.

She brushed a twinge of pity aside. Her business had nothing to do with pity or kindness. The kindly and the pitying died along with the wicked when the plagues came; that had always been the way of the world. Only the careful and the lucky survived. And Catherine.

When he had sat in the chair for a minute without speaking, she said, "What brings you to me, Steven?"

"Don't you know that, too?" he muttered.

She made a sweeping gesture with her open palm. "I read events, not thoughts, Steven. There is a difference. You must tell me what you want."

He looked up at her then, and there was despair in his bloodshot eyes. "I'm ill, Madame Catherine. I've been down to County Hospital, in and out, lately. They say there isn't much they can do for me."

She waited for him to go on.

He sighed again. "I've heard . . . that you can do things."

She stroked the pitted surface of the crystal ball. "I can't cure you," she said quietly. "I give people advice about their lives, nothing more."

"I've heard . . . that you tell people how to get money."

She inclined her head slightly. "Sometimes."

He took a deep breath, as if gathering courage to speak, then suddenly pressed his elbow against his side. He made tight fists of both his hands, and then slowly, slowly opened them, over the course of a long exhalation.

"Perhaps you should be back at the hospital," she said.

He shook his head. "I've heard about the price for the money. I'm willing to pay it."

She leaned forward, putting her elbows on the table and steepling her fingers under her chin. "And what do you think the price is, Steven?"

"Time," he said.

She said nothing.

"It's pretty obvious that if you can tell other people how to get money, you can get it for yourself, too. You don't need to collect it from your customers. But *time* . . . that makes sense. You take years of life and give money in return. It's a bargain a lot of people would jump at."

"It is," Catherine said softly.

"Then you must be very old."

"I am." She watched him search her face for signs of that age, but she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew all he would see was a woman in her early forties, with crowsfeet crinkling her eyes and a touch of gray in her dark hair. A woman not much older than himself. She had looked that way for a very long time.

He eased forward in his chair. "Someone I know won the lottery. Not the big prize, but a good one. Good enough to get him off the street. You gave him the number, two months ago. His name was Charlie."

She thought back for a moment. A tall man, sallow with incipient jaundice, jobless and without prospects. He had been living on gin, in a cardboard box, for quite some time before he found her. "I remember Charlie."

"He said he traded you six months for it."

She nodded.

"He got twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty-one thousand six hundred dollars, precisely."

"And he'll live six months less than he would have if he hadn't come to you?"

She let her fingers interlace on the crystal ball. "It's a little more complicated than that. If he stops drinking and starts taking proper care of himself, he could live quite a long time. Perhaps even the span he would have lived if he had never started drinking. Less the six months he traded to me. If he stays on the booze, his liver will kill him six months sooner than it would have if he'd never come to me. So his lifespan depends on his own behavior."

"But you get that six months."

"Yes."

Steven's knobby throat bobbed as he swallowed. "Is that your standing offer? Twenty grand for six months?"

"There are many offers, Steven," she said.

"Tell me about them."

"The basic rate is five dollars an hour. The number of hours involved is up to the client. For a day, a hundred and twenty dollars; for a year, forty-three thousand eight hundred; for twenty years, eight hundred and seventy-six thousand."

He was staring at her. "Has anyone ever given you twenty years?"

"You might be surprised, Steven," she said, thinking of one evening in the high-rise office, and a man who wanted to be rich more than he wanted to have an old age.

"And how much will you give me?" Steven asked.

She looked down into the crystal ball, as if there were something inside to see, but there was only glass, and the familiar effects of reflection and refraction. The surface was pitted and scratched from years of being knocked about, moved from city to city, country to country. Several times, she had dropped it, but it hadn't smashed. Good quality glass, but still

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only glass. The answer to Steven's question was inside Steven, waiting to be found.

The future was always harder to know than the present or the past. It was a changeable thing, and she herself had changed it for many a client, simply by giving away money via lotteries, racetracks, casinos, and the stock market. Catherine took almost a full minute to find Steven's future.

"How much?" he repeated.

She looked up into his eyes. The whites were yellowing, the rims reddened and watery. She knew the doctors had asked him to stay in the hospital. But he had limped his way out and come to her. "Steven," she said quietly, "I can't give you anything."

He straightened slowly in the chair.

"Not anything," she said.

He opened his mouth, but for a moment no sound emerged, then in a strangled voice he said, "Are you telling me that I don't have any time left?" He pressed his elbow against his side once more, and he clutched it with his other hand. "Am I going to die here, now?"

She shook her head. "You have a little time—a few days. But if I take them, what good will the money do you?"

"How many days?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes!"

She hesitated for just a moment, and then she said, "Six."

His throat bobbed again. "You're sure?"

"Yes."

He squeezed his eyes shut and covered his face with his hands.

"I'm sorry," she said softly.

When he lowered his hands, they quivered. "Do you have a piece of paper and a pencil?" he whispered.

She drew a memo pad and a ballpoint pen from a pocket of her skirt and passed them over. Shakily, he scribbled a name and address.

"Take the six days and send the money to her," he said.

Catherine looked at the name. "Your wife?"

He nodded.

She tore the sheet off and pushed it across the table toward him. "No. I won't take the time you have left."

"It's all I have to give her," said Steven.

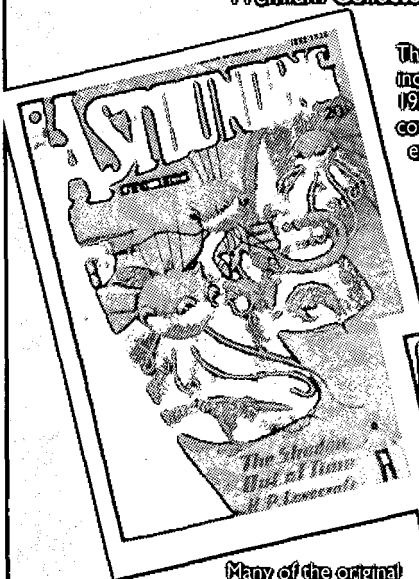
She looked into him again and saw that three years had passed since he had last seen his wife. She saw their final moments together—Steven looking long at the sleeping woman and then leaving without waking her. She saw farther back, to tears and poverty, to job loss and home loss. It was a familiar story: half the people who lived on the street could tell something like it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classic Sci-Fi Art 1930-1949

ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

Premium Collector Trading Cards



The history of science fiction art would be incomplete without the inclusion of the 1930s' and 1940s' *Astounding Science Fiction* covers. Alien races invaded Earth. Space men explored the stars. Wondrous inventions solved mankind's problems. Technology ruled the world. It was almost more than one could imagine.

But now you can.

Many of the original magazines are lost today, but you can re-discover them in their original amazement in *Astounding Science Fiction Collectible Trading Cards* from 21st Century Archives, winner of the 1992 "Non-Sport Card Design of the Year." This 55 card collection is of exceptional quality, featuring UV-coated fronts, four-color fronts and backs, and fascinating background information written by acknowledged science fiction historian Robert Weinberg.

Look for this set where cards and comics are sold or order your sets today, and you will relive the golden age of science fiction. You'll discover that the original imagination and wonder of 50 years ago has not faded with time.

Please send me ___ 55 card sets. I have enclosed $15 plus $3 postage & handling for each set. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please remit check to: Taylor & Woodward Distributors / P.O. Box 20797 / Ferndale, MI 48220

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Listen to me, Steven," she said. "I'm an Adviser as well as a Reader. Take my advice and call her. Tell her you love her. It will mean more to her than a few hundred dollars."

He stood up. "You won't give me the money?"

She shook her head.

"Damn you," he muttered, but without force. Then he turned and limped out, leaving only the jangling bell to show that he had been there. In a moment, even that sound was gone.

Catherine closed her eyes and rested her forehead against the cool surface of the crystal ball. She was tired. Looking inside people was wearing, especially when there was no compensating gain of lifetime. Merely dealing with the kinds of clients who came to the storefront was wearing—the desperate, the destitute, the bottomed-out. Yet the high-rise office and the New Age studio were not better, just different—they delivered the debt-ridden rich who didn't want to lose their lifestyles, the entrepreneurs who would rather pay her in time than pay interest to a bank or venture capital company, the embezzlers, the market manipulators, the wheeler-dealers temporarily out of the wherewithal to wheel and deal. They were fewer than the clients of the shabby storefront, but wearing, too, in their way. Sometimes she felt like chucking them all, top to bottom. But she couldn't, because in all these long years, she had never stopped wanting to live.

Madame Catherine no longer remembered precisely when she was born, or where. It hadn't been much of a time and place anyway—a winter between wars in some duchy or principality that was always changing hands. Her mother had been the village wise woman, using her skill at *knowing* to help others sow and reap, endure storm and drought, and find lost lambs. She had been well-respected . . . until some of her neighbors decided it would be a good idea to burn her. The family had fled then, to become itinerant peddlers, wagon menders, tool sharpeners, any means her father could find to put bread in their mouths. Finally, in the great city of Genoa, where he had thought to find his fortune, he died of the plague, leaving Catherine and her mother to fend for themselves. Catherine did remember the gorgeous blue of the Mediterranean at Genoa, and the fish-stink of its docks. And she remembered the year as well, the first year whose number she had any awareness of—1348, the year of the Black Death.

Her mother had known, of course, that he would die. But knowing had not helped, because the plague could not be evaded like angry peasants, like some pillaging army. One third of the population of Europe was winnowed by plague that century. Catherine and her mother, though, were lucky and lived. But they had no land, and no man. They had only the *knowing* to support them—in Catherine, too, by that time; and so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they wandered through Europe, gypsylike, telling fortunes wherever someone would listen, to earn their bread and bed, and sometimes a little silver.

Catherine's mother had only the *knowing*, no more, for she died of old age, a white-haired, bent-backed crone: half-blind, half-deaf, toothless. But shortly after that death, Catherine discovered that she herself had an additional skill—she could steal time.

She was beginning to go gray by then, and to find an ache in her back in the mornings. And one day as she told fortunes in an inn on the road from Trier to Koblenz, she found herself jealous of a customer. The customer was young, beautiful, a woman just-married and spending her merchant husband's money on the foolish fantasies, as she called them, of a fortune teller. She tossed Catherine a gold coin for those fantasies, because they had been of beautiful children and long life and prosperity. And as Catherine caught the coin to her bosom, she yearned with all her heart to have a piece of the new bride's youth.

In the next moment, she realized that her prediction for the woman had not been exactly right, that her life would not be quite so long. That, in fact, it would be five years shorter than Catherine had first thought. But she didn't say anything about it, because the fortune was told and the gold paid. She only wondered why her skill had so betrayed her. The next morning, there was no ache in her back; nor did it return; and some weeks later she saw that her gray hair was growing out dark once more. At that, she knew what she had done, and she felt a little remorse—but only a little, because the woman had called her skill foolish. Afterward, though, she never stole as many as five years from a single person. Instead, she took a month here, a week there, whenever she needed them, her age bobbing up and down, from a few gray hairs to none at all.

A woman who never grew old could not stay in one place very long, but neither could a fortune teller, so her gypsy life went on as before. The years passed, the decades, and the decades piled into centuries. Sometimes she found a lover, though she always left him. Sometimes she found a patron, though she always left him, too, or her. She grew familiar with many places, many customs, many languages. It was not a bad life, as long as she was young.

In the seventeenth century, she finally found a way to make her own fortune. Foreseeing the success of the Dutch East India Company, she saved up a few gold coins and went to Amsterdam to invest them in a ship that she knew would come home heavy-laden with spices. Within a few years, she no longer needed to ask coin or food for telling the future. The economics of the world had changed, money could breed money, and a woman who could see tomorrow could become rich.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That was when she stopped stealing time and started taking it as pay for *knowing*.

Now, nearly three hundred years and four thousand miles from that first investment, she had all the wealth she would ever need, in stocks, bonds, precious metals and stones, and bank accounts. For nearly three hundred years she had found people willing to trade their time for the assurance of money. Not everyone would do it, of course. Ninety-nine percent would not. But Catherine had become very good at finding that other one percent, or at enabling them to find her.

Reader and Adviser.

She raised her head from the crystal ball. It was still early, but she decided to go home, perhaps watch a few videotapes, listen to a little music. Just now, she lived in a condominium on the lake, a pleasant place she planned to keep for four or five more years, before she moved to another part of the city. She took a bus to the public garage where she had left her mini-van, changed clothes in the van, and drove home, an ordinary-looking middle-aged woman, nothing like the gypsy of the shabby storefront.

The next day, when she arrived at the store, Steven's wife was waiting outside.

"Madame Catherine," she said. "I'd like to speak to you."

Beth was her name, the name that Steven had scribbled on the memo pad. She was thinner than his memories of her, and her face was tired around the eyes; Catherine knew she had not slept the previous night. And there was Steven, focused sharply within her life—Steven as he once had been, Steven as he was now. She had seen him eighteen hours ago.

"Come in, Beth," said Catherine, pushing the door open.

They settled on either side of the table, Beth with her hands folded in her lap, the gypsy fortune teller behind her crystal ball.

"You know who I am?" said Beth.

Catherine nodded. "Your husband was here yesterday. I see that he followed my advice and called you."

Beth's folded hands tightened. "Thank you for getting him to do that. When he left, I tried to find him, but . . ." She shook her head. "So thank you. For giving him back to me."

Catherine waited, knowing there would be more.

Beth stared at the crystal ball. "He thinks you really can tell the future."

"I can," said Catherine.

"And he tells this . . . this really wild story about you giving away winning lottery numbers. In return for years of a person's life."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I do that sometimes," said Catherine. "Do you want a winning lottery number?"

Beth shook her head. "I want Steven."

Catherine leaned back in her chair. "I don't give away lives here. I give away money. If that would help you. . . . ?"

"It won't. I wish it could, but it won't. He's going to die. And I don't want him to. I don't want him to!" Her eyes squeezed shut and tears started down her cheeks. Then she gulped and knuckled the wet streaks away with both hands.

"I'm sorry," said Catherine, and she sighed. How many wives, she thought, had said those words, in plague after plague? Even her own mother, so very long ago.

"Look," said Beth, and she was leaning forward now, touching the crystal ball with one hand, her voice tightly controlled. "What happens if somebody gives you the time and takes the money and then changes his mind. Can you give the time back?"

Catherine frowned slightly. "It's not my policy to give refunds."

"But *can* you? Are you *able* to do it?"

Catherine nodded.

"And does that mean that you could sell someone time. Extra time?"

"You mean for money?"

"For anything."

"Why would I want to do that, Beth? I haven't any desire to shorten my own life. Quite the contrary."

"But *could* you?"

Catherine looked at her narrowly. "Do you mean, would I sell Steven time?"

"Yes. Yes."

"I could," said Catherine, "but I won't. He doesn't have anything that I would accept in exchange."

"But I do," said Beth. She gripped the edges of the table. "I'm young. I have a lot of life ahead of me. Take some of it—some for yourself and some for Steven."

Catherine shook her head. "Think of what you're saying, Beth."

"Don't I have a lot of life left?"

Almost unwillingly, Catherine looked into Beth's future. There was indeed a good deal of life left to her, on the ordinary human scale. "You're all right," Catherine told her. "You'll last into your eighties, as things stand."

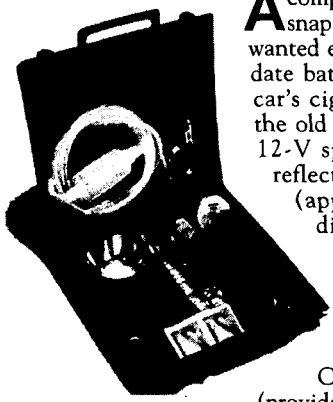
"Then split it between him and me. And take a fee for yourself, a broker's fee. Isn't that a good deal? You gain something from it. We all gain."

"I don't think so, Beth."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ORDER MALL

FOR ROADSIDE PROBLEMS



A compact carrying case of polyethylene with snap lock comes complete with the most-wanted emergency aids. It includes, an up-to-date battery charger that plugs into another car's cigarette lighter-easier and safer than the old jump start cables. There's a powerful 12-V spotlight with lighter plug and red reflector, plus two 15-minute safety flares (approved in 50 states)-plus a 24" sq. distress flag. Also a tank-to-tank gas siphon pump, a 6-qt. bag for carrying water, a roll of plastic tape for emergency repair of hoses and wiring, a coil of wire and 4 elastic trunk tie-downs complete the kit. Clean up with a moist towelette (provided) and you're on your way 11 3/4" sq.
$24.98 (S5.50)#A1826X

NIGHT TRACKER

Light up your night! Night Tracker, the cordless, rechargeable hand-held spotlight packs a 500,000 candlepower beam to give you light whenever, wherever you need it. The beam is 10 times brighter than your automobile headlights and will carry over 1 mile. Operates on recharge-able batteries. Recharge it from 110 volt AC outlet or from any 12 volt car or boat outlet. Perfect for home, travel, boating and camping. Made in the USA and comes with a 90 day warranty. Now includes an amber and red lens attachments.
$79.98 (S6.50) #A1975

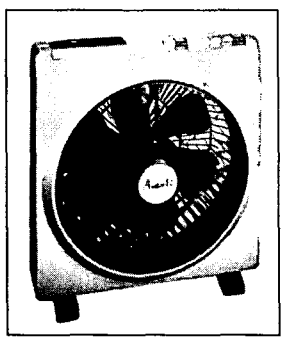
To order by mail send check or credit card number and expiration date **to: MAIL ORDER MALL,**
CALL TOLL FREE 24 HOURS A DAY **1-800-722-9999** **Dept.** 024 AS
MASTERCARD/VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS **PO Box 3006,**
30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE•For Exchange or Refund **Lakewood, NJ 08701**
For each item add shipping and handling charge shown ( ) to arrive at total price. NJ residents add 7% sales tax.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ORDER MALL

TUNE IN WITH TRAVELLER II

People on the go need to have the world at their fingertips and with the Traveller II by Grundig you can tune in to a world of information and entertainment—wherever you are. This sleek innovative radio offers you a choice of 5 shortwave frequencies plus FM and AM reception with a sophisticated 2 inch speaker and telescopic antenna. It features an easy to read multifunction display with precision tuning. The Traveller II's alarm lets you choose the radio alarm or the gentle Humane Wake System (HMS) which features a gradual increase in volume. The display clock offers home time and world time that is easily selected from a concealed world time select switch. Only the innovative electronic technology of Grundig could offer you all this in an incredibly compact unit (5 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 1 1/4"). Comes with plug in earphones for private listening and a sleek black carrying case. Requires 3 AA (batteries included) and offers one year warranty. So wherever your travels take you —the Traveller II is the portable shortwave world time radio that makes the perfect travel companion. $99.00 (S8.50) #A2023



FAN-TASTIC

All fans circulate air, but this is the only fan that circulates air in all directions at once. Wall to wall, floor to ceiling. As the fan operates a unique rotating grill directs the air flow through a 360° sweep, so it is not blasting out in a single current. Pushbutton controls turn grill rotation on/off, select among three fan speeds. This is a year-round fan, ideal for keeping heat off the ceiling in winter, moving cool air off the floor in summer. Measures 16"x18 1/2"x7" slim (12" fan diameter), weighs only 8 lbs. for easy portability. Quiet operation, UL listed, one year limited warranty, costs only $49.98 (S7.95) #A1868

To order by mail send check or credit card number and expiration date **to: MAIL ORDER MALL,**
CALL TOLL FREE 24 HOURS A DAY **1-800-722-9999** **Dept.** 024 AS
MASTERCARD/VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS **PO Box 3006,**
30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE•For Exchange or Refund **Lakewood, NJ 08701**
For each item add shipping and handling charge shown ( ) to arrive at total price. NJ residents add 7% sales tax.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, we do!"

"Beth . . ."

"Don't you see—that way, we can be together again."

"He has more troubles than AIDS, Beth. It wasn't AIDS that drove him away from you."

"We can do something about those troubles if he lives. But if he dies, we can't even try." The tears had started again, and this time she made no move to stop them. "Please, Madame Catherine. We don't have anyone else to turn to."

Catherine looked down at the satin-draped tabletop, at the corroded brass pedestal that held the crystal ball. From the corners of her eyes, she could see Beth's hands to either side, white-knuckled. "You're making a terrible choice, Beth. There's no guarantee that he'll come back to you."

Beth's voice shook. "There's a guarantee now. If you don't do something, he's going to die. Guaranteed."

Catherine reached out to her again, to look at her past, at the better times, to see Steven as she saw him. He had been handsome, once, forty or fifty pounds ago, and he had laughed easily. He had held Beth's hand a great deal, even after they had been married for a dozen years. His last gift, when he still had a job, was a gold pendant with their initials entwined; she was wearing it now.

"You must love him very much," Catherine said at last.

"Very much," said Beth.

Catherine met her eyes. "All right. I can offer you a compromise. In five years, there will be a cure for AIDS. I'll give him six, to make sure he has time to take it."

Beth's eyes were wide. "Will you?"

Catherine nodded.

"And . . . your fee?"

"There won't be any fee."

"No?"

"No. I think you'll be paying enough as it is."

"Oh, Madame Catherine. . . ." She found some tissues in her purse and wiped her face and blew her nose. "I'm sorry to be like this in front of you, but . . . you can't know how grateful I am." She balled the tissues up and clutched them in one hand. "When can we. . . . ?"

"Can you bring him here at four o'clock?"

"Any time you say."

"Four." She waved toward the door. "Go on, now. Go back to him."

Beth stood up. "This is so kind of you."

Catherine looked up at her, thinking that in six hundred years she had never loved anyone as much as Beth loved Steven. Not anyone,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

except perhaps herself. "What will you tell him," she said, "about this deal?"

"The truth. But only afterward. Until then, I'll tell him you've agreed to give me a lottery ticket in return for the time he has left. You don't mind, do you?"

"Will he believe you?"

"I think so. He . . . begged me to ask you for it."

The bell jangled her departure.

When they came back at four, Steven seemed very calm and said very little, and Beth, too, was subdued. He had bathed and put on clean clothing; but he didn't look better—the clothes, Catherine knew, were his own old ones, and they hung just as loose on him as his rags had. And she knew also that he had shot up less than two hours ago, coaxed the money out of his wife, making no secret that he was going to use it to buy junk. His argument had been that he would be dead soon, so it didn't make any difference.

The transfer of time from Beth to Catherine and then to Steven took less than a minute, and only Catherine was aware of it. Afterward, she gave Beth a slip of paper, the supposed lottery number.

"You're finished here," she said. "Go home."

Hand in hand, they left.

Occasionally, over the next few days, she wondered if Beth had finally told him the truth, or if she was just letting him discover it for himself as he lived on, day after day, feeling less and less sick, gaining weight, recoiling from the death that had almost claimed him. She also wondered how long Beth's job at the supermarket would support Steven's habit. But she put her curiosity aside. It had never been her policy to follow a client after striking a bargain.

Two weeks after their bargain, a week after he would otherwise have been dead, Steven came back to the shabby storefront. He waited outside for a few minutes because Catherine was with someone else, but when that client left, he slipped in before the door had even closed.

He thrust the beads aside roughly, and they clicked and clattered as they swung to behind him. "You shouldn't have done it," he said.

He looked better—anyone could have seen that. He had gained a little weight in his face, and the whites of his eyes had cleared. And his clothes were still clean. Catherine saw that he was living with Beth; she guessed that he had expected to die with her.

"You shouldn't have done it!" he said again, and his mouth twisted angrily.

"Sit down, Steven," she said softly.

Instead, he stood behind the chair, gripping its upholstered back. Then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he pounded its cushioned arm with his fist. "How could you *do* that to her?"

Catherine saw that Beth had only told him the truth that morning. That they had had a fight over it, culminating in Steven storming out. Two weeks before, Catherine reflected, he wouldn't have had the strength to slam that door. "It was her choice, Steven," she said. "I gave her what she wanted."

"She tried to tell me you were wrong about the time I had left. She tried to tell me you were a fake. As if I didn't know better!" His fingers dug hard into the chair. "Give her back those years! I don't want them!"

Catherine shook her head. "Our bargain is done. I don't give refunds. I told her that."

Steven let go of the chair abruptly. "I never agreed to that bargain."

"Your agreement wasn't required," said Catherine. "The bargain was between Beth and me."

He pointed at her, jabbing the air with his rigid forefinger. "You stole those years from her. She didn't know what she was doing!"

"You know that isn't true, Steven."

"It *must* be!"

"Then you don't know her very well. And you don't know how much she loves you."

He lowered his hand slowly. Then his shoulders slumped, as if the act of pointing had drained his strength. He leaned on the chair, shaking his head. "I can't let this happen to her."

"She'll have a long life anyway," Catherine said. "Even without those few years."

He kept shaking his head. "You don't understand. I can't take those years from her."

Catherine looked at him long and hard, though only with her eyes. She didn't want to look at him any other way any more. Finally, she said, "Steven, don't you want to live?"

He walked around the chair and sat down. He put one hand on the table, beside the crystal ball. "What will you give me for those years? In money."

"You can live till they find a cure, Steven," she said. "You have the time now."

"What will you give me?"

"Are you sure this is what you want?"

"How much!"

She did the calculations in her head, then looked into the near future for a match. She found one in Saturday's newspaper. "Friday's lottery has a four-digit jackpot for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars," she said. "That would leave you with three and a half months to spare."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He frowned. "I meant for everything."

She looked again. "The three-digit game can give you an extra ten thousand, with fifteen days left over. That's my best offer."

"It's a deal."

"Steven—"

"It's a deal!"

Catherine shrugged. "It's your life," she said, and she pulled out her memo pad and wrote the numbers down. "Don't buy the tickets in this neighborhood. Take the bus down Ashland a couple of miles; you'll find plenty of vendors." She drew a five dollar bill from her blouse and passed it over with the sheet of paper. "Here's your seed money and bus fare."

He tucked the paper and the bill into his shirt pocket. "I'm ready now," he said. "For the other side of the bargain."

It took only a moment for Catherine to draw five years and fifty weeks from him. "Go on, now," she said when it was done. "You have traveling to do."

He hesitated. "Have you. . . . ?

"Yes."

"I didn't feel anything."

"Do you ever feel time passing?"

He swallowed. "Sometimes." He pushed himself out of the chair. "Thanks, Madame Catherine."

"Don't come back," she said.

His lips made a thin, white line. "I won't."

Catherine sat watching the beads sway after he had gone, listening to the echo of the bell. No, he wouldn't be back. She knew that even without reading him.

Three days later, Beth came.

She had been crying, crying till her eyes were swollen and discolored. She slammed the beads aside, stalked to the table, and threw something at Catherine. But that something was only a couple of pieces of paper, and instead of hitting their target, they fluttered wildly and sank to the floor. Lottery tickets.

"He's dead!" she choked, her voice roughened from the crying. "You killed him with these!"

"Sit down, Beth," Catherine said softly.

"Why did you do it? Why did you give them to him?"

"Please. Sit down."

Beth fell into the chair and stared at Catherine with her wide, raw eyes.

Catherine bent to pick up the tickets. She set them on Beth's side of the table. "He wanted you to have these," she said.

Beth shook her head. "It's blood money."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Catherine looked into her then and saw that the police had called at her apartment, had taken her down to the morgue to identify the body, had told her it was a case of overdose. And in the morning she had gotten an envelope in the mail, with these pieces of paper in it, and a note saying that he loved her.

"Yes, it's blood money," said Catherine. "It's always blood money. That's what I sell."

"How *can* you?" Beth moaned.

"He knew what he was asking for."

Beth shook her head sharply. "I don't want it. Take it back."

Very quietly, Catherine said, "I told you, I don't give refunds."

"Then just keep it!" She got up abruptly, and one thigh struck the table so hard that the crystal ball rocked off its brass pedestal and, before Catherine could stop it, fell to the floor. It struck with a loud dull thud, which made Beth gasp and fall back into her chair. Then the ball rolled slowly across the tiles to the nearest wall, where it rebounded gently at an angle and went on rolling.

"I didn't mean—" Beth began. "I didn't . . ."

After a second rebound the ball came to rest almost at Catherine's feet. She scooped it up with both hands and set it back on its pedestal.

"It's all right," she said. "Glass is tougher than you might think."

Beth looked at the scratched and pitted crystal ball, then she reached out a hand and touched it. "I wish I were made of glass," she whispered. "I wish I were tough."

Catherine picked up the lottery tickets, which had fallen to the floor again with the jostling of the table. She set them near Beth's hand. "Take these," she said. "They belong to you."

Beth closed her reddened eyes, as if something shining in the glass hurt them, something more than just the usual complex of reflection and refraction. "They aren't what I want," she said.

"They're the best he could do," said Catherine.

Beth stood up at last, slowly this time, not hitting the table again, and she picked up the tickets, as Catherine had known she would. The bell over the door jangled as she took them away with her.

The next day, Madame Catherine closed her shabby storefront and moved to a spacious modern office in a downtown high-rise. ●

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *Asimov's* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the zip codes for both, please!) to our subscription department; Box 5130, Harlan, IA 51593-5130.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FEEDING THE DEAD

Feeding the dead
you do like a childhood chore
intermittent at best,
complaining you have no time,
pretending it isn't you,
forgetting sometimes
to do it at all,
sometimes letting it slide
till they curl like an unfed cat
rubbing against your life
with a plaintive or anguished cry,
a distant, accusing tone
reminding what's left undone.

You feed the dead,
whose hunger for life still burns,
whose hold on you never goes slack,
who never completely die,
little bits of your life.
You do it from guilt or love,
or the unsaid but nagging fear
that they bite.

And sometimes they do.

—William John Watkins

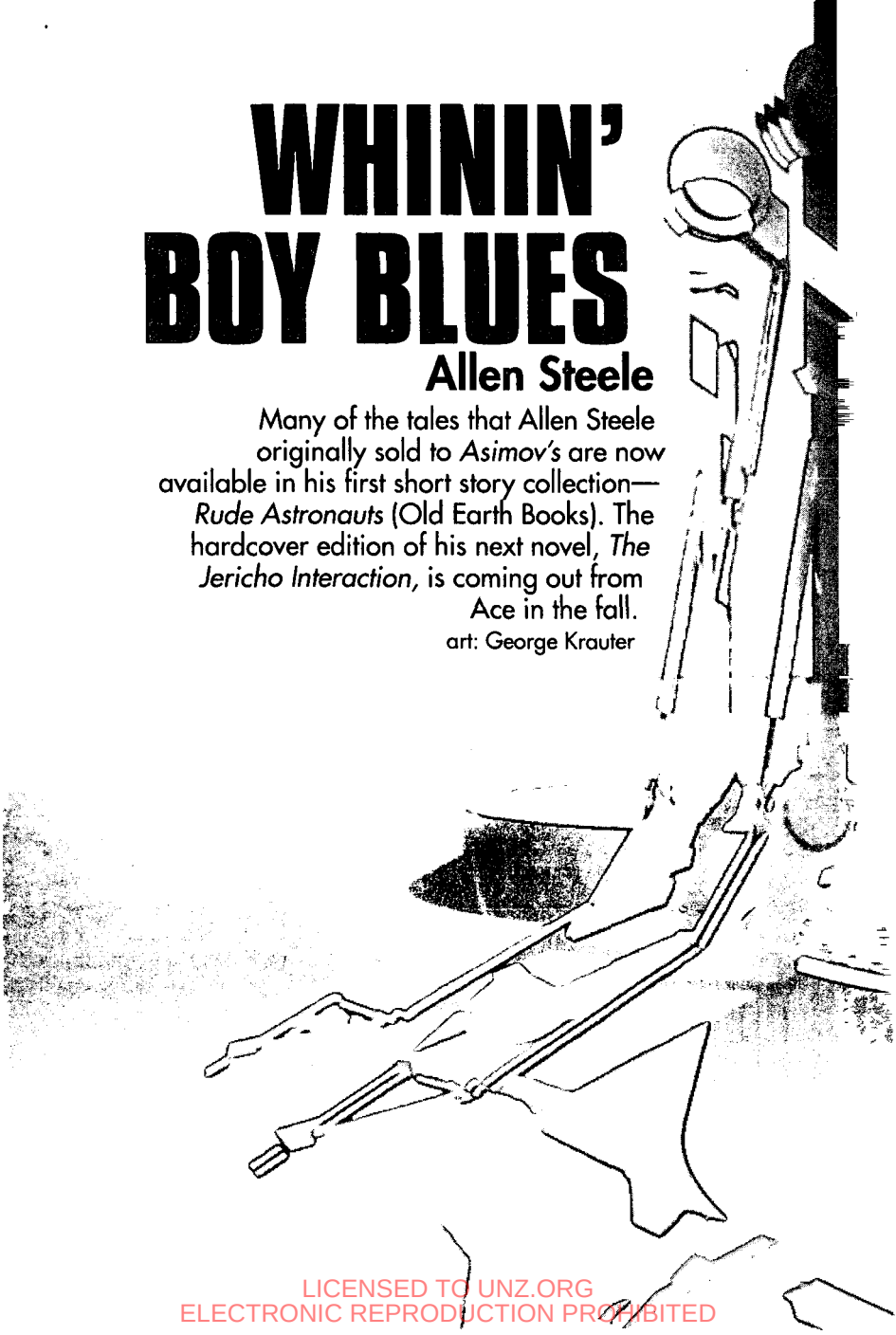
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHININ' BOY BLUES

Allen Steele

Many of the tales that Allen Steele originally sold to *Asimov's* are now available in his first short story collection—*Rude Astronauts* (Old Earth Books). The hardcover edition of his next novel, *The Jericho Interaction,* is coming out from Ace in the fall.

art: George Krauter



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I had been on the mission for less than ten minutes before I was eaten by a puppy.

At least I thought it was a puppy. When the mutt in question is the size of Dogzilla and it's chasing you through an alley, you don't stop to see whether its testicles have dropped yet. So far as I could tell before its big happy mouth came down around me and swallowed me whole, it was a small black dog with rusty fur running through its mane, dark brown eyes and wide paws—maybe a cross between a retriever and a German Shepherd. Kind of a cute little guy, circumstances notwithstanding.

My guess that it was a puppy was based on the supposition that only a pup would bother to run down and eat a spider. I was in the alley for only a few minutes following the drop-off at the curb, following the four other spiders toward the target zone, when the dog suddenly wandered out of a driveway just fifteen feet away, its long red tongue lolling out of its mouth, panting a little in the noonday heat.

I immediately froze in mid-step. The little shit stopped to raise its left hind leg and squirt some piss on an overflowing garbage can the height of an office building. Savoring the moment, the puppy raised its head and looked away, perhaps checking out the alley to see if there was some other neighborhood hyena whose asshole he could sniff.

In that instant, I decided to move. Okay, so it was a dog: big deal. The rest of the team was already climbing the walls of the target house or crawling through cracks in the sill of the basement window, and I couldn't afford to be left behind. My designated entry point, the back door leading out to the carport, was only twenty feet away. All I had to do was duck beneath the rear bumper of the Sunfire parked next to the door, skirt around the left rear tire and exit from the other side of the wheelwell, then make the climb up the cement stairs to the doorframe. After that, the rest was toast.

Sure. Swell idea. But I had barely covered two feet—which, from my perspective, was like making a ten-meter dash upon eight legs—when the dog glanced down and spotted me.

I had forgotten what puppies are like; everything looks good to eat before they learn better, and on this sticky hot summer afternoon in St. Louis my buddy Bowser was bored enough to chase anything that moved. Spider? Yeah, eat'um up!

So he charged straight at me.

I tried to escape. Zig-zag run, dead-heat sprint, even a couple of the hopping movements I had practiced in the simulators, but the little bastard was on my case before I could make it to the safety of the car, its tags jiggling as I raced for safety. Only twelve feet to go, but the distance now looked as unconquerable as twelve light years. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And then the puppy had me in his mouth. Darkness descended as the spider was slurped back on his slippery tongue. I heard the harsh gnash of his teeth as he gnawed on my legs . . . then everything went blank, except for the red menu bar across the top of my screen.

"Jesus," I muttered as I sank back in my couch. "I'm dog food."

"Okay, Roy, you can c'mon out of there," Libby's voice said through my headset. *"We've lost visual."*

I let out my breath, then reached up with my right glove and clicked the menu tabs which would jack me out of the system. The top half of the sensory deprivation cell unlocked and was rolled back by a couple of techs, and I sat up in the couch, squinting in the harsh light of genuine reality. I peeled off the gloves and dropped them on the seat, then stood up and let one of the techs help me out of the egg.

"Anyone get the license number of that dog?" I asked.

A couple of people in the control room grinned; I couldn't see the reactions of the rest of my team, since they were still in their eggs, driving their own spiders. Libby motioned from behind the glass partition for me to join her at her console. I yanked off the cables and dropped them on top of the gloves, then walked across the operations pit and up a short flight of stairs to the control room.

"Tough luck," she murmured, not looking up from her keyboard and screens. She was rewinding the tape; in fast-reverse, I got to see the last moments of my life as a garden spider. "If it's any consolation, the rest of the team made it inside."

I glanced at the other controllers hunched over their own consoles. They were tracking the progress of the four other spiders, using both schematic diagrams of the target house and real-time camera images transmitted by the nanocameras. Jeff and Anna had crawled in through the ground-floor windows and were in the bedroom and the living room respectively, while Mike and Harold were scouting the basement.

"Not really," I said. "If that damn mutt hadn't caught me, I'd have been in the kitchen already." My eyes returned to her console; although the live-action monitor was dark, I was surprised to see that the rest of the board was still active. "Jeez Marie," I muttered. "You mean I'm still alive?"

Libby prodded her bifocals down to the bridge of her nose. "If you qualify being digested in some pooch's stomach as living, yeah, you're alive." She pointed to the status bars. "You lost a couple of legs, but the carapace is still intact and we're still receiving telemetry, so . . ."

She shrugged. "Yeah, you're still in the game." She finished rewinding the tape. "As for the first question . . ."

"Morgan, what are you doing up here?"

I looked around, saw the Operation Chief standing in the back of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

room. Phil Cherry was the only other person in the control center who wasn't busy; he was running the show, and as such he had permission to be his usual asinine self.

"I'm just helping Libby evaluate the mission." I instinctively reached for the breast pocket of my jumpsuit, groping for my Marlboros, before I remembered that I had left my cigs in my civvies, which were down in the locker room. Too bad. Half the reason why I still smoked was because it bugged Cherry.

"You want an evaluation?" Phil folded his arms across the front of his suit. Beige business suit, button-down white cotton shirt, red pinstriped tie, wing-tipped FBI shoes; either he wore the same outfit every single day or he had a dozen just like it stashed in his closet. "A dog ate you . . . how's that for an evaluation? This mission's been compromised because you couldn't outwit a stray dog. I'm . . . "

"Actually, sir, it's not a stray," Libby said. "I think we've got a positive I.D. on it."

I looked back around at her console. She had rewound the tape until she had located the moment when the dog first spotted me in the alley; in that instant, the metal tags hanging from its collar had become visible, and she had used pixel enhancement to zoom in and focus on the engraving on the tags.

"Its license number is number one-one-eight," she said, pointing at a round tag suspended under the puppy's neck. "There's a rabies control tag beneath it, but I can only make out the first three digits . . . see?" She pointed to a smaller, heart-shaped tag which was obscured by the first tag. "Three-one-six . . . that's all I can make out."

"So?" Cherry wasn't impressed. "I don't see what this has to do with anything."

"Let the fingers do the walking." She began to tap instructions into the keyboard. I rested my hands on the back of her chair and bent over to watch her work, but Cherry wasn't done with me yet.

"We needed someone in the kitchen to see who comes in through the door," he said, walking toward us. "You were supposed to be the key man for that position. Now we're now going to have to get someone else to cover the kitchen, and if we can't get him in place when the deal goes down . . . "

"I've accessed the city health department records," Libby announced, pointing at a window she had opened on her screen. "Looky what I found."

We looked. The puppy's owner was registered at Coleman, Barry A., address 115 South Baylor: the exact same address as the house we were infiltrating. The puppy's name was Tripper—faintly ironic, considering his owner's occupation.

"I'll be damned," I muttered. "I got eaten by the sumbitch's dog."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Uh-huh." Libby palmed the trackball to enlarge the dog's image until it filled the screen. "He must put him out during the day when he's gone, then lets him back in when he comes home."

"Poor little bastard," Cherry murmured, his voice a half-whisper as he peered over her shoulder. "No wonder he's hungry enough to eat a spider . . . his master throws him out all day to fend for himself."

It figured. Cherry was a prick around other human beings, but his heart went out to a lonely puppy wandering around an alley. Maybe he wore a rabies tag himself, hidden beneath his polyester shirt and tie.

"Don't you get it?" Libby asked. "If he's hanging around the back door, then he's waiting for Coleman to come home. Right?"

I slowly nodded my head; Cherry waited for her to go on. "Well," she continued, "if his master puts him outside when he's gone, what does that tell us?"

It took me a couple of seconds to figure it out; Phil beat me to the punch just as I was opening my mouth. "Hell's bells," he said. "He's not housebroken!"

I glanced at the mission timer at the top of Libby's screen. T-minus twenty-seven minutes, fifty-two seconds, and several odd milliseconds remained before Coleman was scheduled to arrive at his house. Local reconnaissance had already informed us that his connection was already parked on the street, waiting for his '99 Monte Carlo to pull into the alley and park behind the derelict Sunfire he kept in the carport for appearance's sake.

"Is the spider still copacetic?" Cherry asked.

"Eighty percent," Libby replied. She closed the window and showed him the graphs I had seen before. "Except for visual, we've still got a good fix. Mobility-wise, two legs are down but the remaining six are still operational. The gastric acids in the dog's . . . in Tripper's stomach . . . don't seem to have had much effect so far."

"Can you override the VR system? Go to straight manual? Lemme see you move the legs."

Libby punched a few keys. Another window opened on her screen: a diagram of my spider, inactive within Tripper's gut. She floated the trackball back and forth; its six remaining legs twitched back and forth. "We've got override, good telemetry. So long as the dog doesn't vomit up the spider, we're . . . "

"That's what I want."

I realized what they were getting at. "Oh no," I said, shaking my head as I stood erect. "No way. No fucking way. You can't do this to me . . . "

Libby gave me one of her rare smiles as she glanced over her shoulder at me. "What goes down," she murmured, "must come . . . "

"Don't do this to me!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cherry ignored us as he peered closely at the screen. "Okay," he said, "I think we're still in the game. Libby, keep tracking the dog. Agitate the legs every now and then, but keep it still until Coleman comes home. Then I want the little guy to have a bad tummy ache right after his master brings him inside. Morgan, go back to your egg and get ready to go on-line."

"You can't be serious!"

He turned around to clap a hand on my shoulder. "Link up, agent," he said, grinning at me. "Think of it as service to your country."

Asshole.

The bureau had been following Barry Coleman for several months now, trying to gather enough evidence against him to convince a federal grand jury to seek an indictment.

Coke, crack, smack, various bathtub hallucinogens and amphetamines, the latest bioengineered fuckups like wank and foobah . . . Scary Barry, as he was known on the street, dealt in them all. He was one of the top midwestern operators, brokering dope in and out of St. Louis while carefully maintaining a guise as a middle-class used-car salesman. He almost certainly had ties to the mob, and probably a few connections with the South American drug cartels. A relatively big fish in a relatively small pond, but we hoped that he could lead us to where the sharks hung out.

The problem was, Coleman was no dope himself, despite what he sold. He had maintained a low-profile existence, living in a quiet neighborhood on the city's south side where everyone minded their own business. He didn't have many visitors to his house; he paid his taxes, kept his lawn mowed, even registered his dog. Where he hid his money, God only knew; his bank records didn't announce any hefty deposits or withdrawals, so any larger funds were either laundered through any number of electronic cut-outs on the net or kept in a hole in the ground. He had no criminal record beyond a teenage misdemeanor charge in 1983 for simple possession of marijuana; in the twenty years since, he had been as clean as the whistle no one had ever blown on him. The street told different tales, though, and that's why we were on his case.

The bureau knew that a major deal was going down; a freighter full of raw coke was out in the Gulf right now, sailing under Dutch flag toward Galveston. Coast Guard, Customs and the bureau were ready to bring it down as soon as it dropped anchor and Coleman's contacts assured him that the dope was aboard—about ten minutes before we nailed the ship—so that was no problem. Another boatload of dope, though, was just another boatload of dope: what we wanted were the sellers and, most importantly, the buyer, and that was Scary Barry himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We knew who, we knew when, we knew how. All we required was taped evidence. After we acquired hard evidence of a cash transaction between him and the seller, all the Attorney General had to do was put her Dolly Madison on the papers and his sleazy ass was ours.

That was the hard part. Normal electronic infiltration had failed so far, because Coleman and his people swept his house and car every day to root out our bugs. Likewise, two of our narcs had already been killed in the line of duty. One of them had been lucky; he had only been shot in the back of the head, his body dumped from a bridge into the Missouri River. Trust me, you don't want to know what happened to the second guy.

And that's where my unit came in. You don't need the details; just pick up the latest issue of *Popular Science* and you'll find out much of the technical stuff, as filtered through the bureau's public affairs people. Nanotech, microrobotics, VR teleoperation, shielded cellular comlinks: every cyberdink's wet dream was at our disposal. We're bad, we're one inch high.

So . . . a half-hour before Scary Barry is supposed to meet with his friends from the cartel, a beat-up lowrider cruises down his street, passing the car his friends are sitting in. The dude in the passenger seat pretends to polish off a sixteen-ounce malt liquor; he tosses the can out the window onto Scary Barry's front lawn. Everyone does it in this neighborhood; the guys in the car don't pay much attention. The can is half-crushed already, so it doesn't roll very far; it lands in the grass near the driveway . . .

And, after a few moments, we crawl out.

Neat, huh? Just wait until a dog upchucks you all over some asshole's nice clean kitchen floor.

Light re-entered my virtual world as the spider landed on the linoleum, its legs curled together into a tight little wad. I had already turned my headset volume down, but the sound of Tripper hurling RoboChunks was enough to make my own stomach roil.

I closed my eyes, thanked God that the nanocyberneticists who had designed the spiders hadn't come up with a way to include olfactory input, and waited for the worst of the vertigo to subside.

"Aw, goddammit, Tripper! Bad dog! Bad, bad dog!"

I opened my eyes again, just in time to see two enormous legs advancing toward me: cuffed denim trousers over a pair of pointy-toed cowboy boots, stopping on either side of the slimy pool in which I lay. A high-pitched canine whine of terror, then a pair of giant hands reached down out of the heavens.

I caught a glimpse of Tripper's hind legs as he was lifted into the sky,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then there was the sound of a furry little butt being spanked. "Can't you keep anything down, you little shit? I swear to God!"

Coarse laughter from another room past the kitchen; someone speaking in Spanish. "Hang on a minute, Carlos. Goddamn little shit does this all the time . . . Jesus Christ awmighty . . . "

Another leviathan walked into the kitchen. This one I could see clearly now; to say that he was the biggest Mexican I had ever seen in my life wasn't just a matter of perspective, for he was the size of a Tiajuana taxi. "Hey, man, give him to me," he bellowed. "I'll take him home and make enchiladas out of him."

More laughter. Someone else was behind Carlos, but I couldn't see him. The earth trembled as the cowboy boots stomped on either side of Lake Vomito; I heard the metallic rasp of the back screen door being opened, then Tripper's yowl as he was tossed out into the alley.

"Sorry, Tripper," I muttered.

Time to move, before Master came back to clean up the mess. I unfolded the spider's six remaining legs, tapped the floor pedals to get the gyros to set it upright, then pointed the joystick forward. The spider began to wade through the yuck . . .

"Whoa, man, look at that! Tripper ate a spider and it's still alive!"

Great. Carlos the Taxi had spotted me. He was pointing in my direction, his ugly face displaying the greatest surprise he had probably received since he caught Tía María giving blow jobs under the table during his birthday party.

"Well, step on it!" the voice of the cowboy boots yelled. "Jeez, it's the third one I've had to kill since I got home . . . "

"Whoa, hey man! I'm not stepping in that shit, no way!"

No time to wonder what the boots had meant by that remark. I scuttled straight for the bottom of the kitchen counter; the spider picked up speed once it cleared the vomit, but it was still a long three-foot dash until I reached the plywood wall of the counter.

I barely made cover beneath the wainscotting before the cowboy boot stamped down on the inch of open floor I had last occupied.

"Damn! Fuck!"

More laughter. "Time to call the Orkin man!"

"Fuck you!"

The pointed toe slid beneath the edge of the counter and began to scurry back and forth. Activating tiny claws at the ends of the spider's legs, I sank them into the cheap wood and quickly began to crawl up the vertical face of the counter, being careful to remain in the shadows. The massive leather toe missed me by half an inch.

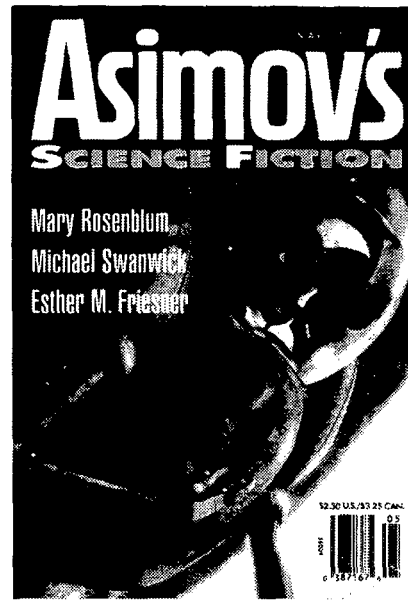
"Whatsamatter, Barry? Can't kill a little spider?"

For some reason, Carlos found this to be infinitely hilarious; I listened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION

Explore worlds of imagination with stories by Roger Zelazny, Robert Silverberg and Connie Willis.



SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE OVER 34%.

✂

❑ Please send me 18 issues of ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION for only $30.97—I save over 34% off the newsstand price.

❑ Please send me 12 issues of ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION for $22.97.

❑ Payment enclosed ❑ Bill me

MAIL TO

ASIMOV'S
P.O. Box 5130
Harlan, IA 51593

OR CALL

1-800-333-4108

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

Outside U.S. & Possessions, 12 for $27.97, 18 for $39.97 (Payment with order, U.S. funds). Please allow 6–8 weeks for delivery of your first issue. Includes GST.

We publish two double issues, in April and November. Each double issue counts as two towards your subscription.

H8SC-7

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to his obnoxious guffawing as I groped my way along the dusty wood, praying that the claws wouldn't give way. Yuck it up, fat boy . . . you'll be stamping out license plates in Brushy Mountain by the time I'm done with you.

The cowboy boot slammed around beneath the counter a couple of more times before Coleman gave up. By then, I was already out from under the front of the counter and scaling up its side like a miniature rock climber, out of sight for the moment from Barry and Carlos and the unknown third guy. I couldn't see anything, which was good because it meant that they couldn't see me either; on the other hand, now I couldn't hear anything either, even though I maxed the volume on the audio receptors. I was caught in an acoustical dead zone between the soft wood of the counter and the nearby corner of the kitchen wall; the voices of the men in the kitchen were now muffled, their conversation unintelligible to the spider's microscopic ears.

I took the opportunity to report in. "What's going on out there?"

"Bad news," Libby replied. *"Units two and three are down and out. Jeff and Anna got squashed in the bedroom and living room . . . "*

"Aw, hell."

"Yeah. They were spotted and swatted almost as soon as he came home. Their spiders are down for the count. Just our luck to be dealing with an arachnophobe."

I sighed. Things were easier when we had handled busts a little further south; down there, people are used to seeing garden spiders. One guy, an arms dealer in Panama City, had even allowed one of our mechs to live in a corner of his bedroom for three weeks while we recorded everything he said to his girlfriend. Seems this guy loved spiders; he thought they brought good luck. Only goes to shows what happens when you get superstitious; the bureau's only problem was penetrating his house to build a silk web for our agent to hang out in while he monitored all those sex-and-talk scenes. And people say government work is boring . . .

"What about Four and Five?" I asked.

"Still down in the basement." Libby's voice was exasperated. *"On the plus side, they managed to find the guns he's got squirreled away down there . . . might be enough to get him on an unlicensed firearms charge, if nothing else. But . . . "*

I heard a hiss and a sharp click through my headset as the comlink was interrupted. *"Units Four and Five have been detained by a material buffer at the target egress point,"* Cherry said. *"They're returning to the primary deployment area. Repeat, they're returning to the primary deployment area. Do you copy? Over."*

I shut my eyes and let out my breath. God, I hate it when they start

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to go techno on you. "Libby," I said, "is Phil trying to tell me that Mike and Harold can't get out of the basement?"

Another pause, then Libby's voice again: *"Roger that, Unit One. It looks like there's one of those long rubber thingies—I dunno what you call it—stapled to the bottom of the basement door. Whatever it is, they can't get into the house, so we're pulling 'em out."*

Cherry again: *"It's in your hands, Morgan. Don't fuck it up again."*

Jerk. Buttface. Meathead. It's guys like him who give narcs such a bad name. "Thanks for the vote of confidence, sir," I said. "I'll keep you posted."

I got off the comlink and concentrated on climbing. It wasn't easy, scaling a vertical surface with only six legs instead of eight, but I made the transverse across the side of the cabinet to the wall without either slipping or being spotted again.

A line from an old blues number repeated in my head as I worked the pedals and joystick. I soon found myself singing it aloud . . .

"Spider, spider, climbing up the wall/when it gets to top, gonna get its ashes hauled/Just a whinin' boy, I don't deny my name."

It took a few minutes, but I finally made it up the wall; from there, I crossed back over to the cabinets, where I scurried across the dusty top, avoiding dustbunnies and old cobwebs woven by my mech's organic counterparts. Another thing my spider couldn't emulate was the ability to walk upside-down across ceilings; it was just a little too heavy to pull that trick.

One out of three ain't bad, though. I found a ledge overlooking the room; from up here, I was able to see the entire kitchen, which from up there looked as vast as the Grand Canyon.

It was like a Sci-Fi Channel rerun of *Land of the Giants,* only a little more stupid. Coleman had wiped up the doggie puke while I was away, so I hadn't missed much. He and the two middlemen had remained in the kitchen; they had opened cold beers and were hanging around the table. An aluminum attaché case lay on the table between half-filled ashtrays and empty beer cans, unopened but never far from Coleman's hand.

And there, standing directly below me, was Scary Barry himself: early thirties quickly going on forty-five, slight paunch at the waistline, short dark hair receding from a premature bald spot on the crown of his head, wearing jeans, a golf shirt, and his trademark cowboy boots. He leaned against the counter just below me, hanging out by the wallphone. If anything, he looked like an overaged frat boy, some guy who shows up at the neighborhood sports bar to guzzle Bud Light and root for the Blues hockey team. Just to look at him, you'd never think he was responsible,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

directly or indirectly, for the murders of several men, including a couple of informants. Talk about the banality of evil.

Carlos was a slug. I had seen a half-dozen just like him: another cheap thug from somewhere south of El Paso, marking time in El Norte between deportations and prison terms. But the third guy in the room, the other middleman . . .

He was interesting, now that I could see him clearly: a thin young dude with long brown hair and a beard, a gold earring in his right ear. He was standing between Carlos and Barry, absentmindedly snapping the fingers of his right hand as he swatted it into the palm of his left. The three of them seemed to be waiting for something and were killing time with stupid jokes, but that third guy was just a little too wired. There was something about him which just wasn't right.

I zoomed in on the kid as I reopened the comlink. "Libby, you been catching everything?"

"Got it."

"Good. See if you can give me a positive I.D. on that kid. He's not someone I recognize."

There was a long pause. While she searched and I waited, the telephone buzzed. A true pro, Coleman wasn't relying on a cordless unit which could be easily monitored from outside the house. The phone was cross-wired with an audio scrambler resting on the counter behind him. Not that it mattered much; his line was already tapped under court order and the bureau computers downtown would easily decipher the conversation even as he spoke. He pressed the scramble button, picked up the receiver and listened for a couple of moments.

"Roy?" Libby said just then. *"We've got a problem."*

"Don't keep me hanging, kiddo. What did you find?"

"That guy? He's with SLPD vice . . . name's Reginald DeCamp, working undercover for the home team. I'll flash you the details."

A small window opened on my screen, and there was Reg DeCamp's face, rotating in three dimensions: clean-shaven, his hair considerably shorter, but nonetheless the same guy. Detective Reginald L. DeCamp, age 27, presently assigned to vice squad, St. Louis Police Department.

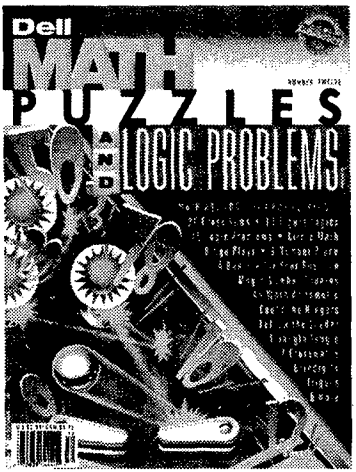
"Oh, shit," I murmured. It happens sometimes in this line of work: the local talent conducts their own independent sting operation and, for one reason or another, either neglects or refuses to coordinate their efforts with the feds. DeCamp had apparently infiltrated this particular buy, hooking up with the Mexican in an effort to take out Coleman, while unwittingly horning in on a bureau operation.

No wonder DeCamp was skittish; he was the inside man in a SLPD vice squad effort to bring down a local dealer. But this wasn't like bringing down a street corner dime-bag operation in Dogtown; he was not only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OUR PROBLEMS ARE YOUR PLEASURES!

SUBSCRIBE TO



DELL MATH PUZZLES AND LOGIC PROBLEMS AND RECEIVE 6 FUN-FILLED ISSUES FOR ONLY $17.94.

EVERY ISSUE IS PACKED WITH BRAIN TEASERS FROM FIGURE LOGIC, CROSS SUMS, WORD ARITHMETIC...TO... CRYPTIC MATH, MAZES, AND TRIGONS!

CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-666-3606

❑ YES! SEND ME 6 ISSUES FOR ONLY $17.94.
❑ CHECK ENCLOSED
❑ BILL ME

MAIL TO
Dell Magazines · P.O. Box 5212
Harlan, IA 51593

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

OUTSIDE U.S., ADD $3.00 PER SUBSCRIPTION. M8SC-1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of his league, he was playing in another ballpark entirely. Give him an A for audacity, a B for balls, and an F for fucking lunacy.

While I was still trying to figure out what to do next, Coleman hung up the phone without saying a word. He turned to the other two men, beaming as if he had just lucked out on the state lottery.

"Gentlemen," he announced as he reached for the attaché case, "our ship's come in. Time to do some business."

Carlos grinned like he was going to have a puppy for lunch. He watched as Coleman pressed a thumb against the case's lock. The case beeped as it unsealed; Coleman raised the lid and stepped back. The green stuff neatly stacked inside sure as hell wasn't Monopoly money.

Carlos put down his beer and picked up a bundle of fifties. "I like this sound," he said as he ran a thumb down the side of the bills. Satisfied with the amount, he picked up another bundle and rifled through it. "Yes, I do like this sound . . . "

DeCamp, or whatever his name was for this ill-timed attempt at a collar, forced a smile; his eyes were locked on the case. He didn't notice how closely Coleman was studying every move he made, but I knew that look.

"Oh, Christ," I murmured. "Barry's onto him."

"You want me to send in the cavalry?"

We had ten agents staked out within a one-block radius of the house, hiding in the backs of phony delivery trucks and utility vehicles. Once I secured evidence of the transaction, all I had to do was give the word and they'd move in. My first impulse was to let the deal go down as planned. As soon as the Mexican took possession of the payola, the bureau would have both him and Coleman by the short hairs, at least in terms of having enough evidence to support a legal search and seizure. The raid could be launched, and even if DeCamp was busted along with the others, we could straighten out matters later.

Yet, as I watched from above, I saw something neither DeCamp nor Carlos could see. Coleman, standing again by the kitchen counter, was surreptitiously sliding open a drawer beneath the countertop.

A Glock .45 automatic, a pink condom stretched tightly down the barrel as a crude but effective silencer, lay within the drawer.

"He's got a gun!" I snapped.

Carlos dropped the last bundle back into the case. "Looks good, amigo," he said, moving to shut the case. "On behalf of my colleagues, I thank you for your business."

"Yeah," said Coleman, still watching DeCamp, "but there's a little matter we need to take care of first . . . "

DeCamp didn't quite realize what was going on. He turned his head

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to look at Coleman, then glanced back at the Mexican; as he did so, Coleman dropped his right hand into the drawer.

"Hang tight," Libby responded. *"We're sending in the posse . . ."*

Screw that. There wasn't enough time to wait for back-up. In another moment, DeCamp would be at Coleman's mercy; if Scary Barry didn't kill him on the spot, then he could use him as a hostage when the squad broke down the door. Either way, the operation would be botched and a cop would probably wind up dead on the kitchen floor.

There was only one thing I could do.

I leaped off the top of the cabinet.

Try to understand: although I wasn't actually inside the spider, and therefore wasn't at personal risk by this stunt, in telepresence there isn't much difference between perception and reality. For me, it was as if I just jumped off a sixty-foot cliff, with neither bungee cord above nor airbag below to brake my fall.

"Morgan, what the hell are you—?"

The floor rushed toward me. I think I yelled as I plummeted downward, my six legs spread wide apart in an instinctive, futile attempt to brake my fall. At the last moment, I had the presence of mind to switch the spider back into climb mode. . . .

Then I landed right where I intended, directly in the middle of the shiny bald spot on top of Coleman's head.

He screamed bloody murder as the spider's sharp little claws sank into his skin. I floored the pedals and jerked the joystick forward. Everything blurred and jerked around as the mech dug in; hair, lights, Carlos and DeCamp just beginning to react . . . and Coleman, howling at the top of his lungs.

"Geddidoffame! Motherfuck goddamn fuck geddidoffame!"

His hands reached up and began clawing at the top of his head. I managed to dodge them for a moment, then a meaty palm the size of Rhode Island slammed down on top of the spider. Everything rocked in the sudden darkness as red warning lights began to flash at the edge of my vision, signaling imminent system crash.

"Hey, what the fuck?" the Mexican was shouting. "What are you . . . ?"

"Spider! Goddamn fuckin' spider! There's a . . . !"

Still, I managed to hang on. I put the mech in reverse, began scuttling backward across his head, out of the bald spot and deeper into his thin hair. Huge fingers scrabbled at me, trying to grab hold; I could see deep scratches in his scalp, oozing blood in a ragged trail behind me, as Coleman began dancing around the kitchen. There was a crash as he upset the open drawer; I caught a glimpse of the Glock falling out on the floor.

"Ride 'em, cowboy!" Libby yelled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It might have been funny if it wasn't me riding this particular horse. Coleman's left hand managed to wrap itself around the spider's fuselage; hair and skin ripped away as he struggled to yank me free.

"Motherfuckin' goddamn . . . !"

Through the cage of Coleman's fingers, I could see DeCamp lunging for the gun on the floor. Bewildered, the Mexican was too slow to react; he had barely begun to move before the young cop grabbed the gun and, kneeling on the floor, brought it up to cover the fat man.

No time to think about that now. Libby's voice was meshed in static; warning lights around the periphery of my vision told me that I was about to lose the spider. I retaliated by sinking its claws into Coleman's fingers. Barry, who was now more scared than scary, yowled and let go; I held my breath as I began to drop again.

"Freeze, asshole!" DeCamp shouted.

Coleman wasn't freezing; worked up in a berserk rage, he was already pivoting toward the cop next to him, who was giving all his attention to Carlos. All this I absorbed in a single moment of free fall on my way down to the floor . . .

But I didn't get there. I landed on the nape of Coleman's neck. My gorge started to rise as the spider rolled, end over end, down the fleshy slope . . .

Straight down the back of his shirt collar.

I almost felt sorry for the poor bastard—almost, but not quite—as I sank my claws into the soft flesh between his shoulder blades.

Cherry was good to me. He rewarded my efforts by letting me see Coleman one last time before they sent him down the river.

A couple of cops escorted me to the holding pen in the county jail where he was under lockup. On the way, I walked past the cell where a couple of lawyers were consulting with Carlos the Taxi. Carlos didn't look very happy; considering the fact that he had been videotaped with his mitts all over several hundred grand in drug money, he was probably going to a place where you can't buy your freedom from a local judge. Not easily, anyway.

I brought Tripper with me when I made my visit; the little pup wasn't heartbroken when he saw his former master sitting by himself on a bare bench. The agents who had raided the house had found Tripper's water dish as dry as a stone; the few morsels of food remaining in his bowl were several days old and swarming with ants. None of this helped to give me much sympathy for the band-aids plastered on Coleman's head.

Coleman glared at me as I approached the bars. "That's my dog," he muttered.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll take good care of him while you're gone." I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scratched the pup behind the ears for good measure; Tripper yawned, gave a happy little peep, and favored Coleman with that certain go-to-hell look which only abused animals can muster.

Coleman gazed down at the floor and let out his breath, then he stared back up at me. "Well? Who are you? What do you want?"

"Nobody you know," I replied. "At least, not by face . . . but we've been close."

He looked confused. After a moment, he shook his head and gazed back down at the floor again. "I've talked to my lawyer," he muttered. "I've got nothing to say to you, whoever you are."

"Sure you don't. I just thought I'd drop by for a visit . . . see how you were doing and all that."

"Are you a lawyer?"

"Nope."

"Then get the fuck out of here."

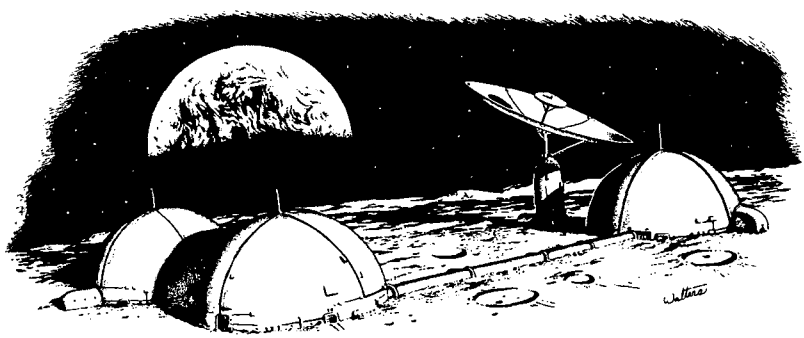
"But I thought you might like someone to keep you company," I added.

He glanced up at the dog, then looked down at the floor once more. "I don't care," he murmured. "Take 'im to the pound or something, I don't give a shit . . . "

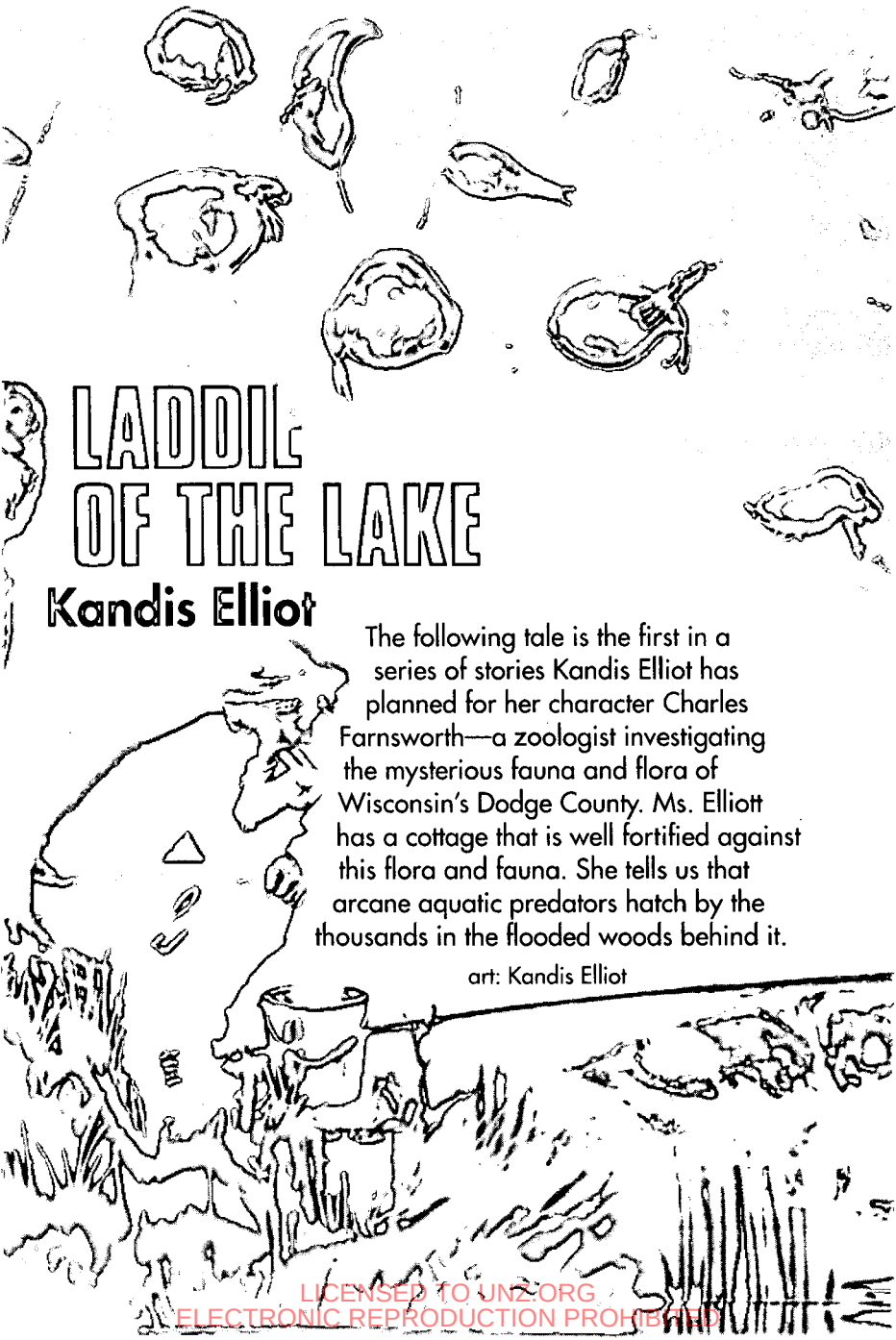
I shook my head. "Naw," I said, digging my hand into my trouser pocket. "I don't mean old Trips here. He's going home with me. I've brought someone different . . . "

The timing was perfect. He was just beginning to look up again when I pulled out the spider and tossed it through the bars onto the bunk next to him. He was still screaming as I turned away and began to walk back down the cellblock.

Okay, so it was a cheap gag. The spider was rubber. But what's a good job if you can't have a little fun, right? ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LADDIL OF THE LAKE

Kandis Elliot

The following tale is the first in a series of stories Kandis Elliot has planned for her character Charles Farnsworth—a zoologist investigating the mysterious fauna and flora of Wisconsin's Dodge County. Ms. Elliott has a cottage that is well fortified against this flora and fauna. She tells us that arcane aquatic predators hatch by the thousands in the flooded woods behind it.

art: Kandis Elliot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO LINZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ruth Gunderson huffed and puffed around a chronic *Pneumococcus* pocket in what remained of her right lung as she traipsed through thickening brambles, popple saplings and first spring mosquitoes, "the big kind," she wheezed, slapping awkwardly. She deftly maneuvered her worm can, milkpail, gob rag and brace of cane poles, affixed with 20-pound-test black line and number two catfish hooks like hay grapples, with instinctive aplomb; Ruth had been traipsing, puffing, and talking her way to fishing holes for more than half a century. "And a long time before that," she added to her internal/external dialogue, for there'd been many years when she never had to think about stiff lungs, only putting fried catfish or bluegills on the table. "With some nice mashed rutybeggys. Rutybeggys and pickled sucker," she added, espying a hedgerow of white-blooming wild plums. " 'Suckers spawn when the plum trees blossom.' "

Today her knees worked a little more smoothly, her ankles were not so swollen. She'd soaked in a bubble bath last night and this morning tested a glass of winter wine made from potatoes and raisins. "Next year, more raisins." Her constitution thus bolstered, she'd passed up her usual fishing hole on the banks of the sluggish Turtle River and headed off across the cow pasture into Screaming Woman Woods, where big ash and willows sprouted like jungle cypress, making the river's backwaters seem more like the Okefenokee than a Wisconsin impoundment marsh.

Her poles picked their own way through blackcaps and dogwood brush, and soon her old barn boots squished on the boggy ground around towering trunks and little kettle holes full of black water, now breeding mosquitoes by endless scores. Ruth paused to examine one of the miniature ponds, hardly larger than a washtub. The tiniest of animals darted, wiggled and corkscrewed hither and yon in that little world: red mites, water fleas, mosquito wigglers—"Gosh-awful lots"—even inch-long pink fairy shrimp. All those motes appeared in spring ponds, dried to dust by summer, yet returned in multitudes as soon as the snow melted each March. "If that ain't magic," Ruth nodded, "I don't know what is." Every spring, nowadays for grandchildren, she'd catch a jarful. Lacy and delicate, gliding upside-down through the water, fairy shrimp amazed as much as fireflies. Only country kids ever seemed to know about them, even though city kids were the know-everything smart-mouth ones.

"Still are," Ruth murmured, lifting her gaze from the kettle pond to branches intertwined overhead. "Sure hope I don't have to hear the Woman scream today." Smart-mouth city bird watchers said it was just a barred owl, but Ruth never bought that. A barred owl hoots like other owls, only with a southern accent: *Who-cooks-for-you? Who-cooks-for-you-all?* Ruth had heard the scream dozens of times, and the closest she'd say it sounded like was zoo monkeys, when they fought and bit each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other. Heaven knew what the woods Screamer was; nobody'd ever seen it. "No *owl,*" she said, trudging on. "That's for sure."

Nearly a half-mile into the woods, trees began to give in to drowned roots, a few still in that thin-leafed stage of dying but most long-deceased from high water levels, their twigs and bark stripped off and only the skeletons of larger boughs left. Ruth knew her way through the dead-tree marsh to deep water, following a narrow, raised path—all that was left of a span of old basswood trunks laid end-to-end, dragged out of the woods and positioned during a long ago winter when even men fished with worms and cane poles. The moss-covered path led out past sedge humps to the dropoff of the impoundment lake proper, where the trail ended at a platform of old buttress roots. The roots once supported twin white ashes, grown to sizeable trees during the past century when few dams graced natural waterways. "Nowadays them idiots yank at the floodgates like they was a one-tit cow," Ruth grumbled, thinking of the series of locks responsible for the impoundment. Water levels rose or lowered according to no plan that she could ever fathom, save that it maximally disturbed rivers and lakes all over the county, ruining good fishing for everyone. "Especially *real* fishermen," said Ruth, who caught more fish with her two old cane poles and patient bank-sitting than any hundred stink-boaters could ever hope to encounter in a lifetime of making noise and aggravation.

With a sigh that afforded both relief and a little extra oxygen, she settled down on a polished root. She glanced up at the two broken trunks on either side, ruined watchtowers erupting from reeds and boggy soil. Ruth considered the waters of time lapping at her own foundation, and said to the drowned ash trees, "Day comes I can't crawl out to a fishing hole, that's the day I'll be a-marching into the Hereafter right along with you old fellows."

From somewhere far back in the woods called a soft *whooo-cooks-for-yooo? Whooo-cooks-for-yooo-all?* Throughout fall, winter, and early spring Ruth heard owls hoot from noon till next dawn. "Birds and menfolk sure like to hear themselves talk," she observed sagely.

She dug in her worm can for a nightcrawler and threaded a squirming choice one onto her hook. She positioned her plastic red and white cork strategically above the half-ounce sinker, then swung the offering in a graceful arc out into the lake. She knew it was about five feet deep there, "Just right for big catfish or maybe a nice smallmouth today." Landing either would be tricky. What had once been a ton of tree branches over her head was now a maze of rotted downfalls under water. Catfish lived in that unseen mess below. "And smallmouth are sure to swim into it lickety-split, soon as I set the hook." But that's what cane poles were for; setting the hook meant derricking Mister Fish right up into the air and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into her milkpail before he could even think of wrapping her line around a snag. "No reeling and reeling while the dang fish swims to China."

She watched the cork drift and settle in a promising spot, wiped her fingers on the gob rag, then reached to her worm can for another nightcrawler. She kept a careful eye on the first line; on her best days she wouldn't even get her second pole in the water until she'd cleaned out ten or twelve bullheads who couldn't wait. The cork stayed as motionless as the spring air and afternoon sun, so she proceeded to bait her other hook, adjust the cork and consider a likely-looking spot near a fallen branch. "Gotta be a catfish under there," she said. "But snags, too." Then her first cork jiggled.

Slowly Ruth put down her second pole and extended a hand toward the first. She knew exactly when to grab and yank. Touch the pole too soon and the fish feels you.

Ploop, the cork disappeared.

She snatched at the pole. Even as her work-knotted fingers closed on it, the pole shot through her grasp, off the bank into the water, down and out of sight.

"Well, land sakes," she sputtered. "Land sakes. I never." She was an outspoken Czech who'd married a stoic Norwegian. Since Nels had said about four words in the last fifty years, "I do" constituting half of them, it'd been up to Ruth to teach their four sons that vocal communication was the norm for humanfolk. Now she could only watch the water with speechless amazement. She'd had to chase a lot of carp-pulled poles along the bank and sometimes right into the water, but she never *lost* a pole. Never had one been taken under without coming *up*. She squinted up and down at shoreline cattails, then searched farther and farther out over the lake. No pole.

"I never," Ruth swore again, really meaning it. Shaking her head, she turned back to her second pole, all ready and waiting its turn. She swung the bait out into the same spot as the first. A big, hungry fish lurked down there. *And* her tackle—probably tethered permanently to some snag, although she continued to look out over the lake for a long, stiff water snake pulled by some monster northern pike.

She retook her seat and gripped her second pole tightly, her old vessels asurge with excitement. Nothing like a big fish to turn fishermen eight to eighty-eight into jittery tigers, heart aflutter with greed and longing. Her gaze flickered nervously from cork to lake surface to tree roots. A soft hooting, much nearer, almost made her jump to her feet.

Who-cooks-for-you?

The cork quivered. Just a hair. Like something huge brushed past it down in the black water, looking for another nice juicy nightcrawler but now cautious from a hook sting. Ruth felt her breath start to clench, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not from the *Pneumococcus*. "Bite that hook," she pleaded softly, barely keeping her seat. "Come on, fish."

The water between her and the cork, a good ten feet out, began to roil. Ruth watched the curious churning. Not like the swirl of a big fish, or even a mush-rat. *Like a eggbeater down there,* she thought.

Suddenly her cork was gone and her pole nearly ripped from her hands. Surprise tightened her grip so solidly that her shoulders wrenched forward. Had she been standing, she knew she would've been yanked off her feet as effortlessly as a dog tied to a car bumper. But this time she was ready. She pulled back. The old cane pole bent into a full rainbow arc, its tip dancing furiously over, in, out of the water. "*Got you!*" That pole wasn't about to break. Nor the line; she could beach snags, haul in the biggest fish (or old tire) Wisconsin's lakes and rivers had to offer, even straighten out number two hooks on mossy-back turtles before snapping black twenty-pound-test.

The water calmed. The bent pole seemed fastened to a ton of cement. "Well, shoot," she said. "Did he snag me on the roots of one of these trees?"

The pole straightened slightly. He was coming up. Slowly. Ruth held the tension on the line steady.

At first she thought a horsewhip was piercing the surface of the water and snaking upwards like a charmed cobra. Then another rose beside it. Ten inches, two feet, a yard out of the water. Mesmerized by the slowly rising objects, she nonetheless kept her grip on the pole and her line tight. Deep within her eighty-plus-year-old heart Ruth Gunderson felt an icy thrill of fear. The horsewhips attached to a pink wad of *something*. Like trimmings from a butchered pig. Intestines. With two black croquet balls stuck on each side.

Just as she sensed the croquet balls *looking* at her, the pig intestines uncoiled and flung themselves at her head.

If wet thorn-studded darkness hadn't locked tightly over her face, Ruth would have let out the shriek of her lifetime. Then she clearly heard some sympathetic angel—or demon—let loose one hell of a scream somewhere in the woods behind her.

Charles D. Farnsworth studied his guest. Her face evidently held together by Band-Aids, she sat half-hidden behind plaster biological models and teetering stacks of journals on the other side of his monstrous oak desk.

"*Pig* guts, Mrs. Gunderson?"

Ruth Gunderson had been hustled in by a smirking ichthyologist, the last of a string of biology faculty to shunt the old lady and her problem (one of *those* problems) to someone else. The fact that she looked like the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loser in a Cuisinart-versus-pedestrian incident doubtless further eroded her credibility. Any being, in Charles Farnsworth's view, who so titillated the disdain of his fellow faculty deserved at least a moment in his guest chair to catch her rather reedy breath and relate her misadventure one more time.

Farnsworth watched her try grimly to concentrate on him. Her eyes kept finding distracting things to flick to. He could guess what the folks at home would hear tonight: *there was this big blue fish a-hangin' from the ceiling, swimming alongside one of them flying dinosaurs with the long skinny tail, and then there was all them little moving things in fishtanks linin' two walls damnnear up 'the ceiling, swearta God, and a whole passel of pickled things and I don't mean peppers in bottles up against another wall.* (What the devil's a "passel," Farnsworth wondered.) Even when she managed to focus again, her attention derailed to the wall directly behind him, papered with photographs and drawings of still more animals, people with animals, animal parts, other parts that looked distressingly like human parts "after animals had had at 'em." That's how a Wisconsinite out of the cornfields would put it, Farnsworth knew. He was quite versed in local vernaculars.

She gave the blue fish—a seven-foot *Latimeria* and suspended by thin wires directly over her head—a last look and forced her attention forward. "Professor Barnswort—"

"That's Farnsworth, madam. Charles Farnsworth."

She mulled it over. "Ain't Norwegian, are you?"

"No ma'am, nor Polish or Czechoslovakian. I am English."

"Not from Wisconsin then?"

'The English come from England."

Farnsworth watched her size him up. Local consensus saw university professors as either matronly little chaps or bearded sods gone shamelessly to fat. Ah, Farnsworth thought, but she sees I am so unlike others she has met that she suspects I might not be a real professor at all, instead some part-time counselor whose main duty is handholding daft cases like herself. Farnsworth hoped she noted he stood a good six-three when he'd shown her in and offered her a chair, and that *this* professor seemed in quite splendid shape, the hair sprinkled with a touch of silver notwithstanding.

She eyed his desk nameplate, "What's the 'D' for? Charles *D.* Barnswort?"

"That's *Far*nswor*th.*" He received an irked *what-I-said* look. "Madam, can you add to what you've told me about this incident with an unknown species of animal?"

She eyed him suspiciously. "You're the fifth fella I been sent to see up here. If you don't believe me, I sure ain't going over it one more time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mrs. Gunderson," he assured her, "I am quite convinced you experienced an adventure of some sort, whatever its nature. As to what your boogyman, or boogyfish rather, *is,* exactly, that remains to be discovered. Now, you claim you were nearly drowned and eaten by, ah, a wad of living pig guts." Farnworth's instincts could immediately divine the telling of a real event from a hallucination. He could also sense if he were being hoodwinked, or told about a common creature in some way misidentified, or whether something—his heart already pounded—*new* had actually been discovered.

Ruth straightened belligerently. "Well, *'course* it wasn't pig guts, Professor. That's what I said it *looked* like. And the horsewhip things sticking out of it I'd say were its feelers."

Farnsworth leaned over his desk. "*You'd* say? Why would you say they were feelers? Do you know something about this creature nobody else does?"

She flinched as though asked a question in front of the whole class, then got miffed. "Now look, Professor, no one in my family tells lies, we don't make up stories, and the doc said it weren't no stroke or nothing like that. I'm old, but I ain't crazy. I got half my hair tore out and all skinned and those thorns stuck all over. When I say something from the lake up and grabbed me, don't you doubt it one minute. I don't know nothing about no creature what looks like pig guts with feelers. But I do know a whole lot about *real* critters. More than your look-down-yer-nose pals here in this Zoology department, I'd say." She snorted, took a breath, tapped a worn fingernail on one of the desk's few barren spots. "Now maybe it ain't what I thought it was. But it was there, and it was strange as heck, and I think somebody better take a look-see before anyone else gets grabbed."

He played devil's advocate. "Do you think it might be a space alien? Isn't the Turtle River Impoundment near where they had that UFO abduction last October?"

"I always figgered that bum Johnny Savitch just up and run off, and good riddance, his poor ma all them years. Now I ain't so sure—he fished a lot. Professor," she said hesitantly, "it's not I want to say green spacemen are a lotta hooey. It's just I think most people never took a good look at natural critters we got all around us. Now, the reason I said 'feelers' was because when I thought about the pig guts, I started to think, what animal looks like that? And right away I think about what a crawfish looks like, you turn him over. Sure, a person knows what the eyes are and the feelers and the pinchers and all that. But you ever look at that little *face* under there? Lordamercy!"

"A crayfish? You think you hooked a giant *crayfish?*"

"All I'm saying is, the world is full of mighty strange critters, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there's no saying us humanfolk seen every last living one of 'em yet. Don't have to invent animals from Mars."

And with that Charles D. Farnsworth sat back in his chair, steepled his fingers, and smiled. He'd suddenly realized what Ruth Gunderson's mysterious beastie might be. It might be real. "My dear lady. We share a most rare and remarkable philosophy."

What she least expected to hear, obviously. She nearly relaxed, except the blue fish above wouldn't let her, no more than the sword allowed Damocles to enjoy so much as a pint of bitter at the banquet. "You do believe me then, Professor?"

"Of course I believe you," Farnsworth replied. "Not the least because only a sincere person would stand for half the Zoology department scoffing in her face before finding one open mind among the dim and short-sighted masses." He pointed to the fish over her head. "Behold *Latimeria,* last living species of the coelacanths, a group of lungfishes thought to have been extinct for 60 million years, until a trawler netted one off the coast of Africa. Seems the locals had been catching them for years. Couldn't stand the taste but used the skin to roughen up the inner tubes of bicycle tires before applying a patch. It took the outside world another twenty years to *believe.*"

He motioned her over to one of the dozen bubbling ten-gallon tanks. "Ever seen anything like these?"

She peered at little disks whirling slowly over a sandy bottom. "Well, I never. Are them things what we just voted as—oh, what, we got a state animal, a state plant, a state muffin—seems we got a state this-or-that for every dang thing—state *fossil.* Trilobites!"

"Trilobites indeed! Mrs. Gunderson, you surprise me."

"I read the papers."

"Well, we are gazing here at another kind of belief. These animals are annually brought to me by one or another wayward soul who has misidentified them as trilobites. Can I shake their belief that this apparition is in reality *Triops,* the tadpole shrimp?"

"Never heard of it."

"You would have if you lived in a western state. It appears every year in temporary ponds, hatching out of resting eggs which are laid before the pond dries up. Naturally, people don't see the tiny eggs in the dust of dried-up ponds, so when these animals mysteriously appear in spring potholes and drainage ditches, why, of course, any *logical* man believes it is a prehistoric animal that has survived unobserved in his pothole, and that pothole only, for the last 500 million years." He glanced at her deadpan expression. "Wisconsin has something related to *Triops,*" he added, "called fairy shrimp, of which you also probably never heard."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now she flicked a cynical eye at him. "I suppose next you're going to tell me a barred owl screams like a woman."

He moved to a tape player crammed among a shelf of bird books and binoculars, shuffled through a collection of old tapes, selected one and inserted it. At the end of a few sparrow tweets came *Who-cooks-for-you? Who-cooks-for-you-all?*

Ruth nodded. "Yep, I heard that a hunnert times out in the woods behind—"

The hooting grew to a very un-owllike howl. Then a mutilated sound that could raise gooseflesh even in a well-lit office.

Farnsworth watched her brows lift. "You've heard that a few times too, I presume?"

"That's the *owl?*"

He grinned. He loved barred owls. Always getting panic calls in the middle of the night by everybody from hayseeds to law enforcement. "I rather fancied they sounded like fighting Rhesus monkeys."

She gave him that peculiar look again. "Well, we got barred owls in our woods. But I don't know if that last part is what I hear out there every now and again. Sounds more like a woman screaming to me."

"Are you saying you have *two* mysterious animals for me, Mrs. Gunderson?"

"We lived with the Screamer since my Grandpa's time and before. Right now let's stick to the critter in the lake. Something's got to be done. I'm afraid to let my grandchildren fish even in the river now."

"Quite right! Allow me to call my assistant—graduate student, good chap but always mucking about with computer gadgets. I swear students don't even know what an animal smells like any more—" Farnsworth paused at the telephone, picked up the staff directory and pointed out a name: Jacob Judziewicz. "Tell me, Mrs. Gunderson, how would you pronounce this?"

She replied at once. "Chakup Yoo-day-vits. Any relation to the Horace Judziewiczes? Neighbors, four miles down the lane."

Farnsworth tapped phone buttons. He still couldn't both look at that name and pronounce it at the same time. Good old Wisconsin name. "Hullo, Jake? Get in here, and bring your camcorder. We're going fishing."

Charles D. Farnsworth gazed up at the two rotten, snapped-off twin trunks of what had been huge trees years ago. They formed a rather cozy enclave for a fisherman. Afternoon sun shone down on crimped sedges that had uprighted themselves after Ruth's trampling a week ago. Brown marsh water melded with the deep blueblack of the impoudment lake, its rippled surface now diamond-spritzled with blinding sunflecks. Jake

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Judziewicz, gypsy-haired bohunk solid as a corn-fattened Angus steer and with an expression to match, kept his camcorder on a meaty shoulder. There the beige box had resided all through Ruth's Screaming Woman Woods and down the soggy walk to her encounter site.

"Looks like nobody's tried their luck after your big one got away, Ruth. Ruth?" Farnsworth looked around for her Band-Aided old face.

She peeked around one of the ash trucks. "I wouldn't let nobody but Nels come out. Wanted to fetch my pail and poles for me, he said. And to just check. Don't know what he thought it was I hooked. Only brought back our one pole here, with the line bit off."

"I'm surprised your husband didn't send for the sheriff."

"I'd a killed that old fool, he'd gone and made me a laughingstock. That's why I went up t' Madison and got *you,* Professor."

Farnsworth caught his student's lopsided grin. "Keep that camera shooting, Jacob. Would you bait your pole, Ruth? Just like when you hooked him last week."

She crouched beside the protecting trunk to skewer a worm and adjust a cork on the cane pole they'd brought along. She wiped her hands, replacing the old towel and bait can back in a shiny new milkpail. "Nels couldn't find a trace of my old pail," she said, looking at the replacement. "Worm can's probably down there in the weeds right in front of you."

As Jake kept the camcorder on him like a hovering eye of God, Farnsworth took the prepared tackle and tried to maneuver its business end into the water before tangling it utterly in shore reeds. "Throwing your remaining bait at the creature made him let go, you said?"

"Didn't exactly throw it. I just kinda fell right down on my stuff and grabbed anything I could reach before he pulled me in. Wanged the old bastard with the milkpail, then jammed my worm can at him hard as I could. Next thing I was waking up, stinking like a dead fish."

Farnsworth managed to submerse the bait a few yards from shore. The red and white plastic ball she called a cork twitched calmly on surface ripples. He watched it painfully between the flashing sunsparks and lowering sun, now blazing with June intensity straight before him over the lake.

Ruth crept a little closer behind the two men. "Should'a brought your hat, Professor. Sun's a little hard to take here, afternoons."

Bright moments rolled by. Farnsworth contemplated life with permanent retinal damage. The cork bobbed placidly.

"You ain't going to run out of film, are you, son?" Ruth asked, watching the steady camcorder.

"No, ma'am," the young man replied. "Digital camera. Hundred-gigabyte internal optical drive. We could stand here and take movies of Charley not catching anything for a whole week."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Silence lasted a lot longer after that. Until a shriek like chalk on a blackboard amplified a hundred times made all three anglers nearly leave their socks. "What the bloody hell was *that?*" Farnsworth yelled.

Ruth Gunderson folded her arms smugly. "What's the matter, Barnswort? Never heard a barred owl before?"

Eventually both Jake and Ruth took a seat on the sedges. Farnsworth, knowing how hard it was to get mud stains out of charcoal-grey gaberdine, resolutely kept standing, pole firmly locked in the crook of his arm. The sun's angle seemed perfect for frying the hair in his nostrils.

Every three minutes Ruth encouraged him with a conventional fish-wisdom sound bite. "We were making a lot of commotion. Gotta be quiet if you want to catch fish.

"Don't wiggle around. They can see you standing there on the bank.

"You didn't touch the worm, did you? Fish don't like the smell of some folks. Some can't even catch a carp for love ner money.

"Know what we call carp here in Wisconsin? Illinois Brown Trout.

"They don't bite when you hang on to the pole like that.

"You *do* got a fishing license, don't you, Professor?"

Twenty minutes. No nibbles.

"Well, I warned you," Ruth reminded him, "I been fishing these waters dang near eighty years. Only had the thing bite once. No reason for you to get lucky right off the bat."

"We could take a skiff and try a fyke net just beyond the snags, Charley," Jake said hopefully.

Farnsworth remained undaunted. "Ruth enticed it here once. For whatever reason the beast was impelled to reveal itself to her the first time, we shall take the chance that it will not be able to resist ag—" And then he was yanked through the air, into dark water and headed for the benthos.

As his gasp of surprise inhaled a mouthful of lake, Farnsworth felt his head spearing into a leathery mass that gave way just enough to keep his neck intact. Something malleable and gut-like lined with rose thorns coiled around his shoulders. He felt the press of a huge body in vigorous motion. Water churned with tarry bubbles all around, their murky green flashes glinting off something metallic and shiny. Farnsworth freed his hands and wrestled against the tight grasp holding him under water, grabbing at something that felt like a spinning propeller. His mind began to spin just as fast: *something alive not a fish get a grip on it and, oh yes, do try not to drown—*

The creature bucked in sharp, painful jerks, driving spiny prickles through the pile of Farnsworth's good suit jacket and into his hide. He got his feet oriented underneath, kicked hard into bottom muck and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

straightened with all his strength against the weight of the gyrating mass. His head shot out of the shallow water.

At least two hundred extra pounds weighed him back down. He sucked in a lungful of air and bellowed, "Jake! I have it! Keep sh—" The thing wrenched him sideways and under again. He'd gotten a glimpse of salmon-pinkness, leathery plates, bolus of spiny ropes entangling his upper body, Ruth's croquet balls that were at least cannon balls, the lake all around erupting in a boil. Underwater his hands bounced and batted off whirling flesh. Something hard and sharp suddenly pinched his rib cage. He grabbed what felt like two baseball bats whittled to points. He hung on as the creature twisted, spun, flung itself and him down into masses of snags. He felt his captor hit a submerged log and ricochet off with an eerie underwater clang.

Just as he sensed he hadn't had a breath for a dreadfully long time, his deadening fingers gave up their hold on the creature. At the same instant the beast let him go, kicked a wall of muck into his face with a powerful fin, and decamped for the vastness of the open lake.

Farnsworth was next aware of having his face pressed into flattened sedges while someone sat on his back and squeezed muddy water out of his lungs.

"That's it, Charley," Jake said, pounding away.

"Cough it all out, Professor," Ruth instructed, "or you'll end up like me. Fell in when I was a girl. Didn't know it, but I got a pus-pocket of germs in one lung that come back to haunt me dang near sixty years later. Docs took out one whole lobe and it's still there. Cuts my wind something awful."

Farnsworth tried to rise. "*Off,* Jake." He turned over, assessed his suit as a total loss, pushed a hand inside his shirt to scratch a multitude of welts swelling on his shoulders. "Did you shoot it?"

Jake patted the camcorder. "You bet. Lot of splashing, but we should be able to see something on the frame-by-frame." He lifted a flap on the camera's mounting box and opened a ten-button keyboard and a display screen the size of a sample cereal box. In short order he had five minutes—almost the last minutes, ever—of Farnsworth's life repeating on the screen.

Farnsworth pushed between Ruth and Jake to stare at himself standing on the bank and holding a long cane pole straight out, looking for all the world like a CEO taking a piss. The next moment he'd become airborne and headed for the deep six. "Go back. Any indication of something underwater just before that?"

"There's your cork starting to bob," Ruth pointed.

"Look at the surface of the water, Charley. Like a scuba diver down below."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The recording played further; Farnsworth watched the activity with some alarm. "Jake, how could you let me stay under *that long* before coming after me?"

Jake shrugged a herculean shoulder. "I didn't go after you. Ruth hauled you out with the cane pole."

"Pole came a-floating up when the monster slipped the hook," Ruth explained. "I snagged you in the seat of the pants. Twenty-pound test did the rest."

Farnsworth blinked. "I weigh thirteen stone!"

"Twenty-pound black line'll haul a ton if it's free in the water. It's snags or when an old snapping turtle digs his feet in, you gotta be careful. You were floating free as a drowned cat."

"Besides, you told me to keep shooting," Jake added. "Okay, here's the one time you came up with the creature."

"That's it, all right," Ruth said. "Same thing what got me last week."

The image seemed nothing more than one erratic splash; Jake had been hopping around almost as much as the watery combatants. One fortuitous frame revealed enough. Jake pointed to the bolus of pink-gray ropy stuff, highly reminiscent of intestines, wrapped around Farnsworth's neck. "It's a multiple-biramous head appendage. And these things you're hanging on to here have to be the mandibles."

"They're like walrus tusks," Ruth observed.

Farnsworth nodded. "And look at all the thoracic swimmerettes. No wonder that water boiled."

"Them all those eggbeaters, Professor?" Ruth peered into the dim little screen's frozen frame. "That's my milkpail!"

"I *thought* I saw something flash like metal down there. For a second I suspected a diver playing a rather nasty joke." Farnsworth studied what appeared to be a fez draped jauntily above one of the creature's stalked eyes. "He's bridled by the handle."

The last frame before man and creature vanished again showed a splash containing Farnsworth's feet, only one still shod, entangled with a deltoid tail whose sheer webbing stretched at least an arm's breadth across.

"That marks him, Charley," Jake said, jamming a finger against the camcorder's screen. "Abdomen ends in a flattened blade. A *Thamnocephalus,* no doubt about it."

"Tham-no-ceff-a-what?" Ruth asked.

Farnsworth whistled slowly through his teeth. "Ninety thousand times larger than any known species." He stood, somewhat shakily, turned to the sun setting over now-calm waters, and let a smug leer of triumph emblazon his face. "I hereby christen thee *Thamnocephalus gigas Farnsworthii,*" he intoned. "The world's biggest oxymoron. The Jumbo Shrimp of the Lake."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Jacob Judziewicz waited at the office door while Farnsworth finished dictating a departing note into his computer.

"If this beast is what I suspect, then it has not, to date, been taken from fresh water alive. Nor even whole. Indian legends tell of the Great King of Crayfish, the Bush-Head of Gitche Gumee. Marceau found suspicious large pieces of chitin at prehistoric Menominee campsites. I myself have unmasked as dentinized mandibles several museum specimens of so-called saber-toothed tiger fangs and Pleistocene bison horns. If our hunt is successful, we may find ourselves holding the last hatchling of a resting egg dating back to the glaciers."

Charles D. Farnsworth took a final look around his office. His gaze went from the tanks of little creatures to the photographs of larger, finally settled on the lobe-finned blue fish suspended from his ceiling. For a moment the great fish seemed to swim in those mysterious waters off the coast of Africa, and Farnsworth let himself feel the breeze hot from beaches of lions and watched wide blue heads of *Latimeria* parting the sea of time once again.

He turned to the student and gestured dramatically. "Hie thee to the lorry!" They headed down to the Zoology department's rusty Suburban; a camouflage-green skiff extended almost a third of its length beyond the tailgate. Jake carried the camcorder. Farnsworth clutched his Marina King bluewater marlin rods and a set of downriggers.

At the Gunderson farm, Jacob Judziewicz towed the skiff, loaded with oars, buckets, cooler, gaff, bait cans, boat seats and tackle, a quarter mile across a stubble field to the Turtle River. "You have a future as a grain elevator, young man," Ruth said, watching the stout Czech hoist the craft over the last barbed-wire fence without so much as rattling its cargo.

With Jake pulling the oars, the trip down-river commenced at whitewater pace. Farnsworth no sooner screwed his downriggers to the rear gunwales than the skiff surged into the dark waters of the impoundment lake. The 16-foot craft, mainly used by ornithology students for waterfowl counts, held the downrigger lines a scant two yards apart. Farnsworth stood between them like a sternsprit, watching his lines twang and tug in the weed beds.

"Lake's only five feet deep, Professor," Ruth said, eyeing two hairy wads of lakeweeds following some hundred yards astern. " 'Cept when some idiot messes with the floodgates for no practical reason." She baited up her cane pole with a bolus of nightcrawlers. "Big gob of worms keeps you from snagging on the weeds. Them musky baits of yours are just going to bale hay all day." She dropped her loaded hook off the side and watched the heavy sinker take it down. No cork today, what with the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trolling. Twenty-five feet of black line angled into the wake and stopped just short of tangling Farnsworth's starboard rig. They'd troll until Jake got tired of rowing or until their sandwiches and thermos of ice cold milk were gone, and Ruth knew which of those was going to come first. She'd also brought a paper bag with antiseptic, big tin of Band-Aids, and a bottle of winter wine, just in case.

In forty-five minutes Ruth had landed three walleyes and a tiger musky. Farnsworth had her fillet the catch immediately and, fishing regulations notwithstanding, toss the entrails into the water. "I'm real glad you talked me into this, Professor," Ruth said, baiting up her hook yet again. "You sure you don't want me to fix up one of them lines right for you? Got lots of worms."

Farnsworth smiled slyly. "All you have to do is chum the waters with your magic attractant, Mrs. Gunderson. We now have proper gear to do the rest."

"Still wish you'd sit down, though. You know what happened last time."

"Hence the downriggers, dear lady. I won't be a towing bit today. Not even a marlin could steal our gear."

She eyed him dubiously. "Ain't fishing for no *mar*-lin."

And then the tip of her old cane pole, which she had wedged under her boat seat, dipped sharply. An arc, straight down.

"Yes," Farnsworth whispered. "Yes."

Jake stopped rowing even as the pole eased back and the line slackened.

"He'll come back," Ruth said just as quietly, as though their normal conversation of a moment before had not been heard by the beast in dark water only feet below their skiff.

The water six yards to starboard began to move. A slow simmer, a roil, then the bubbling of great agitation. A sizzling trail of bubbles burned across the surface, trailing the drift of their boat. The agitation diminished, sank out of sight, then rose at another spot. Then to port, then again to starboard. "His swimmerettes must have the propulsion of a trawler screw," Farnsworth murmured. The roil began a swift circling of the craft, impelling Farnsworth to snatch the fillet knife and cut his downrigger lines before the beast tangled with them. He glanced at Ruth, saw that she sat huddled on the exact center of her seat with her arthritic knees drawn nearly to her chin and her hands pressed against her mouth. He crouched to pick up her cane pole, pulled a section of the black line across his shoulders and wedged his feet under the lip of the gunwale. "Ready the gaff, Jake," he commanded. " 'Thank God they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able.' "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Say what, Charley?" Jake asked.

"Hemingway. *The Old Man and the Sea.* Do try to read some literature along with those computer manuals, my boy."

Slack was straightening out of the black line and three pairs of eyes silently fixated on it. It grew taut until beads of water jumped from it and Farnsworth's new tweed jacket creased sharply where the line crossed his shoulders, and he relinquished his grasp on the cane pole to wrap the line around his two hands while he still could. Water began to hiss against the flattened stern of the skiff.

"Professor! You'll cut your hands."

"Pain does not matter to a man, ha-ha," Farnsworth yelled, the wind in his face and his feet up against the gunwale of the skiff.

Halfway across the impoundment the boat slowed and began to bob, adrift. The line slackened again. Then angled upward.

"He's coming in!" Farnsworth straightened to peer over the unrevealing water.

Not five feet out rose two wavering thin snakes like horsewhips. When they had come up high enough he saw that they emerged from beneath a badly dented milkpail, still perched at a jaunty angle on a pink bald pate. Black balls, glistening with faceted sunlight, erected slowly and steadily from stalks on each side of the head. Beneath a mass of rolled-up sausages curved two brown mandibles like walrus tusks. Pairs of red and blue paddles the size of little badminton rackets extended down the front of a tapering, segmented body. The paddles hung placidly; the water did not roil now. Slow undulations of a submerged tail lifted the apparition inch by inch, segment by segment, paddle by paddle from the water, until the stalked cannon-ball eyes stood level with Farnsworth's own.

Man and fairy shrimp regarded each other for long silent seconds.

"Gaff, Charley," Jake whispered softly from behind.

Farnsworth realized he blocked the student's aim, and with glacial caution eased one line-tangled hand back to grope for the handle of the offered gaff. His fingers curled on it unseen, for just then, with equal caution, the ropy sausages on the creature's head began to unfurl.

Transfixed, Farnsworth watched the meaningless wad straighten into a short elephant's trunk, which split, branched, and branched again, forming a giant's handful of prickle-studded tentacles. Reaching. For Farnsworth.

"Duck, Professor! He's gonna getcha!"

Ruth's warning followed him as he sailed through the air.

His face contacted the leathery ridges and nodules of the underside of the shrimp's head. Its mass of glands, tiny oral palps and cleaner-appendages, the crustacean equivalent of lips, smacked Farnsworth's

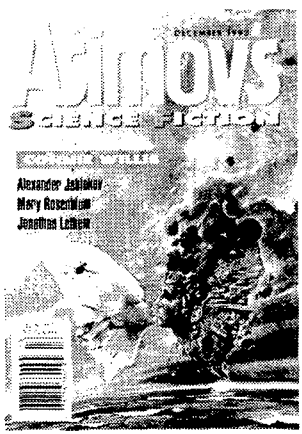
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead-on. He raised the gaff he thought he'd grasped and discovered belatedly that he held the butt of Ruth's cane pole. He brought it clanging down on the milkpail and lost his grip. As the shrimp's embrace drew breathtakingly tight, Charles Farnsworth felt himself sinking into the dark tumultuous waters of his recent nightmares yet again.

The beast's multitude of swimming paddles started a gleeful whirling. Farnsworth was conscious of being pulled around in tight circles, the shrimp swimming upside-down with him on top of it, held so tightly face-to-face he thought he should suffocate not from mere drowning but from the sheer enormity of that embrace. A smell of lobster ate up through his nose and mouth against his desperate efforts not to breathe. Worse, he feared that the fishing line still wound around his shoulders and hands ended in the creature's mouth, so that now he not only kissed the world's largest fairy shrimp, but also some part of Ruth's generous wad of nightcrawlers.

Furiously he fought against the prickly tentacles clasping his face. He managed to ball one hand into a fist and bring it down on the shrimp's head, the water enfeebling his swing, which landed with a dulled clang against the milkpail, finally dislodging it. As the pail headed for the bottom its bright glint of sunlight bespoke how near the surface the melee flailed. With a contortion driven by pure instinct Farnsworth managed to pull away and break into the air.

A Special Offer for Science Fiction Fans...



❑ Please send me 18 issues for only $30.97.
I will save over 34% off the newsstand price.
❑ Please send me 12 issues for only $22.97.
❑ Bill me. ❑ Payment enclosed.

MAIL TO
P.O. Box 5130, Harlan, IA 51593

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

CALL TOLL FREE
1-800-333-4108

Outside U.S. & Poss. 12 for $27.97, 18 for $39.97. Cash with order, U.S. funds. Price includes GST.
Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue. We publish two double issues per year.
Each issue counts as two towards your subscription.

H8HP-2

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The shrimp surfaced with him. In a geyser of roiling water it sought to reestablish its grasp, its two dozen little eggbeater belly paddles churning and head-tentacles reaching like gigantic witches' fingers. The long tail flipper, arising along each side of the tapering abdomen and extending forty inches beyond the tip, rose up behind like a translucent sheet of mylar.

Square upon this whirling, flapping mass sat Charles Dickens Farnsworth, Poseidon upon his upside-down sea-serpent steed.

"Charley, get off," yelled Jake Judziewicz.

Fighting tentacles as snarled in black line as his own manacled hands, Farnsworth stole a glance at his frantic student. Jake stood poised, the gaff upraised and aimed. Ruth crouched behind him, six-inch fillet knife in one hand and her new milkpail ready in the other. The boat rocked twenty feet away.

The shrimp's own flailing held both itself and Farnsworth on the very surface of the lake. Desperately he shook and tugged at the tangled line which now roped him firmly on his bucking mount. The churning swimmerettes, at least two of which formed his saddle, pounded merciless agony into his nether regions. He forced his thighs to grasp the animal tight and halt those mind-destroying paddles. The thorned tentacles found his hair and again pulled him nose-down onto the creature's face. The two tusk-like mandibles beside Farnsworth's ears speared down along his ribcage. Their sharp, hard tips pinched the sides of his chest, chopsticks holding him bent over at the waist and snug as a fried wonton. Then he abruptly felt another hard prod jabbing against his buttocks.

As dark water closed above his head once more, Farnsworth suddenly got the picture. "Ay," he gurgled, thinking, *"a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hand and into the wood."*

Energy from a store he'd never been aware of filled his spent muscles. He poured all he had into his legs and kicked out of the saddle. Head yet ensnared, even as his body floated free he felt the jacuzzi-turbulence of the water signaling a tenfold surge in the flailing of little paddles, anxiously trying to close against him again. He pulled mightily at black line around his hands, cutting deep as he freed himself from the tangle. Like a croc with clamped prey the shrimp rolled over and over, tentacles contracting until Farnsworth thought his brains would squeeze from his ears. A darkness signaling more than just depth of water poured the ink of oblivion across his eyes; with his final effort he wrenched clear of the beast's grasp and popped to the surface.

Choking, sensing the shrimp immediately behind him, he thrashed with leadened arms in the direction of the skiff. Jake dug an oar in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

water and the boat jumped to intercept. Czech farmboy muscles seized him by the collar and lifted him away from the monster and the deeps.

He'd hardly dropped onto firm wood planking when Ruth Gunderson shouted beside him.

"Professor! I've got him!"

His eyes could barely focus. She was reaching over the side for something in the water, came up with the butt of her old cane pole—

"He's all tangled up! He can't move!"

The *Thamnocephalus,* still wound tight as baled hay in twenty-pound-test black line, stretched antennae-to-tailtip two feet longer than the skiff. Jake had lashed it fast to stern and bow by the time Farnsworth was able to sit up and take a full breath without heaving out a pint of water. He accepted a Dixie cup of homemade hepatic toxin which Ruth informed him was, God forbid, potato and raisin wine.

The student took a moment to admire the catch before retaking his station at the oars. "You're one damned lucky Brit, Charley. I still can't believe you got away from him."

"I can't believe you were dumb enough to get caught by him twice," said Ruth, dabbing either red Mercurochrome or searing acid on his line-scored hands.

Sucking air through clenched teeth, Farnsworth hissed, "He would've plucked you or Jake, then. I know you set great store in your choice of bait, Mrs. Gunderson, but that fellow wasn't after garden hackles." Sitting on the opposite gunwale to counterbalance the skiff, he had to crane his neck to get a look at the shrimp. One stalked eye lifted to look back at him rather disconcertingly.

Jake nodded. "I suppose a big guy like that has problems finding a good meal."

Farnsworth cleared a raw throat. "Meal, hell. Bloody bugger was after a *mate.*" He felt some heat finally rising into his face. "It's probably why I'm still alive. He wasn't trying to *hurt* me."

"Charley, you mean—?"

"Professor, you mean—?"

A distant *who-cooks-for-yooo* echoed across the cold wide waters of the impoundment lake. "Mind you keep an eye keen for the sharks," Farnsworth growled, rubbing bruised shoulders and trying to wiggle his haunches into a less painful position on the hard gunwale, an impossible task.

Ruth Gunderson shouldered her cane pole and worked her way back along the mossy trail into the woods. Her milkpail held a mess of summer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crappies. It'd been another good day, one of many since the Professor had taken the monster from the lake.

Stiffly—her ankles again—she skirted weedy depressions where once teemed God's tiny beasties, whose dried eggs, she now knew, awaited another spring. "Thank goodness there's none going to hatch more lunkers out in the lake," she observed to herself. What with the nonsense at the locks and the fluctuating water levels, the lake's population of Jumbo Shrimp hadn't been able to reproduce since the impoundment first flooded over ancient Pleistocene resting eggs. No dry cycles. Or that's what the Professor assured her, since he hadn't been able to catch another one. Probably explains why the critter got romantic notions regarding humans, too, she considered. "Big and pink. Guess we looked good enough to him, after all those years."

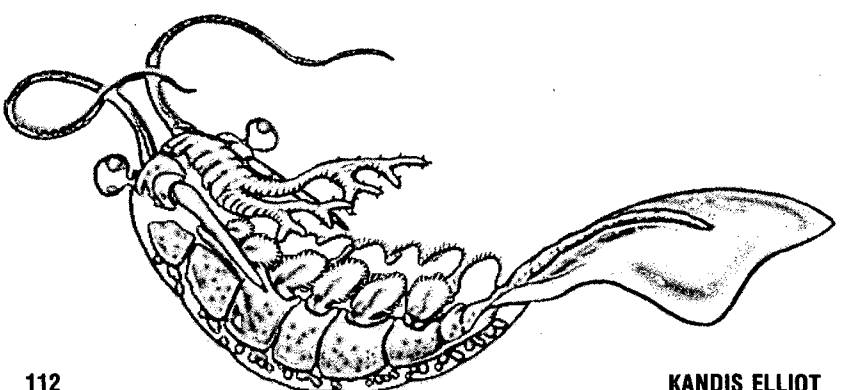
Ruth smiled, envisioning the Professor's office as she'd seen it on her last visit to Madison. "Sure be a mess to clean if that new tank of his ever leaked." She wondered how such a big critter could remain content there, after having a whole lake to itself. Or at least the shrimp had calmed down and started eating again, once the Professor came back from the hospital.

Ruth shook her head. "I *told* Barnswort to take care of himself. Them pneumonia germs can just sneak up on a body *any* time."

As she climbed over the cow-pasture fence while trying to avoid rampant poison ivy, the Screamer let loose in the woods just behind her. Ruth flinched into the ivy and dumped her pail of fish as the howl wailed like a tornado siren, crescendoed to a strangled, rising shriek and abruptly cut off.

"*Dang* it," Ruth cursed, stiffly getting down on one knee to pick up fish and untangle black line from barbed wire. She started off across the pasture, more than ever looking forward to a nice glass of dandelion and raisin wine.

"Sure ain't no *owl*," she muttered to herself. "And that's a fact." ◎



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

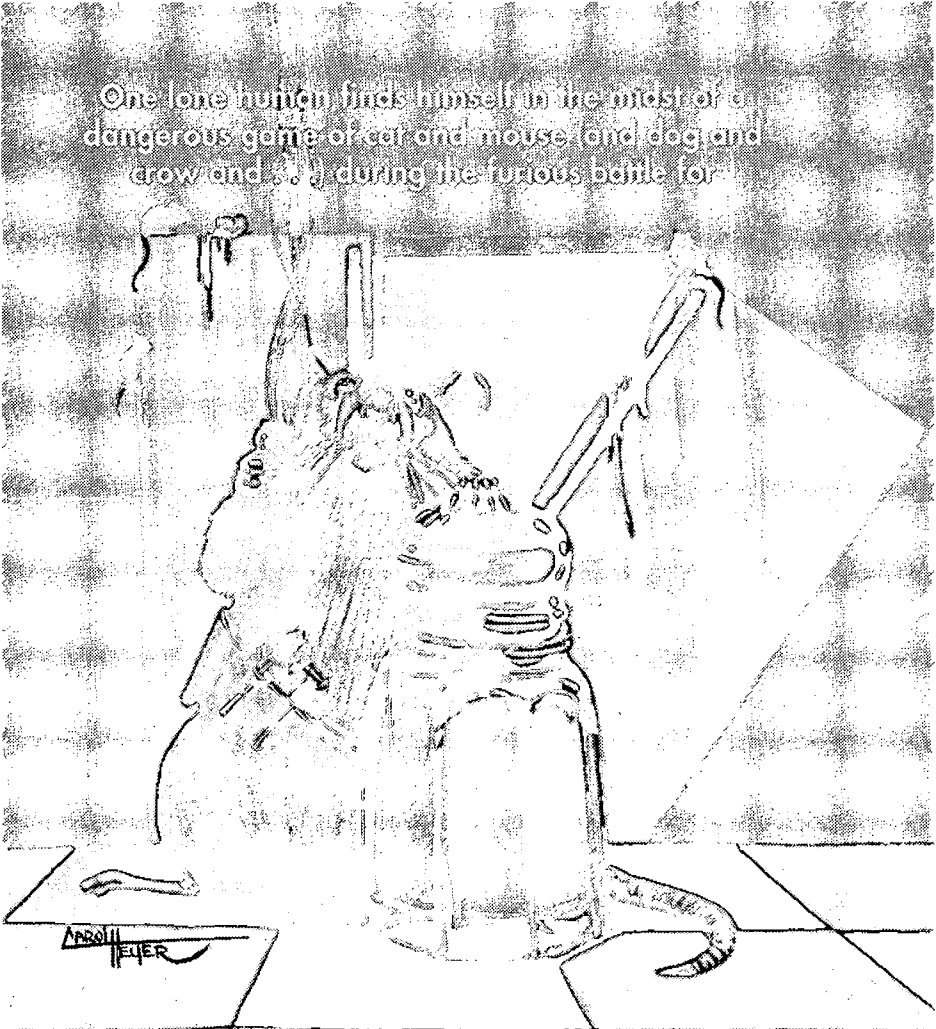
FIRST CHECK-UP AFTER CHEMO

We go at noon
to the kind witch with her poisons,
toad's foot, cat's eye, blood & ash,
to lift this curse that lingers
even when it's gone,
a shadow's shadow,
shapeshifter of cells
driven out by potion,
by amulet
by transuranic emanation
by warlocks in white coats
each with a spell
over a different Elemental,
In the shrine lifted to disease
and profit,
each with a mumbo and a jumbo and a fee,
each with a prophecy
and a charm against death;
they search the site for spoor,
for droppings,
for the three clawed footprint
pressed in the flesh,
anything to warn us
of the return we conjure against.
And always, outside the ring of salt,
outside the rites
the trial by ordeal,
the ritual it fears more
than we fear it,
it circles, snout to the ground,
looking in vain
for a break in the circle
to get back in.

—William John Watkins

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One lone human finds himself in the midst of a dangerous game of cat and mouse (and dog and crow and ...) during the furious battle for



A BAG OF CUSTARD

Michael H. Payne

and Carol Hayes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was late Friday afternoon when my dog Bruce walked into the front room carrying a paper sack in his jaws. He put it on the floor, looked up at me with his big, brown eyes, and said, "Look, Jim, I've got to go out of town this weekend. Could you watch my bag for me?"

I had only just come in, hadn't even undone my tie yet, and all I could do for a minute was sit on the couch and stare at him; I mean, this wasn't normal behavior for a Lab-Doberman mix. The conversation then proceeded along these lines:

Me: "You talked!"

Bruce: "I did, yes."

Me: "But dogs can't talk."

Bruce: "Says who?"

Me: "Everybody!"

Bruce: "Everybody thinks they can win the lottery, too."

We went on like that, him countering my every claim just by standing there and talking, till I ran out of arguments. Then he said, "Now that that's settled, you're not busy this weekend, are you?"

"Well, no," I had to admit. Ever since Christine left, my life had been pretty quiet.

"Great." With a toothy grin, he picked the bag up and set it on my lap. It oozed against my legs. "What's in here?"

Bruce gave it a poke. "Custard."

"Custard?"

"Yeah. You know: eggs, vanilla, milk, sugar. Custard."

I looked at the bag, then back at him. "But *why?*"

"Why? What do you mean 'why'?"

"Why *custard?* Why *watch* it? I mean, custard can pretty much take care of itself, can't it?"

"Not *this* custard." He put his paws on my knees and stuck his snout right up to my ear. "Enemy agents may try to take this custard while I'm out of town." He licked my cheek, then dropped onto all fours. "Well, see you Sunday." And he turned and trotted off into the front hall.

"Wait a minute!" I grabbed the bag as I stood up; it was warm and damp in my hands. "You can't come waltzing in here after three years of being just a dog, plop a bag of custard in my lap, and tell me I have to guard it from enemy agents! *What* enemy?! Why *custard?!* How in the—"

"It's better if you don't know," I heard him call back to me. "Besides, they might not come, and you wouldn't want to get all worked up over nothing, would you? Just put the bag somewhere safe and don't tell anyone you have it. See you!"

I ran into the hallway in time to see the front door swing shut, but by the time I got it open, Bruce was nowhere in sight. The yard was empty,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the front gate closed, the street as quiet and shady as it could be with kids down the block screaming and playing tag around the parked cars.

After a minute of staring, all I could do was close the door with my elbow, my hands full of squishy paper sack, head back into the front room, and set the bag on the coffee table. The top was twisted shut, so I undid it to take a look. Off-yellow, smelling softly of vanilla; it was custard, all right. I started to wonder how Bruce had managed to make it, but I put the brakes on that train of thought; dogs baking custard is very near the top on my list of things *not* to think about. So I wondered instead where I should put it.

The refrigerator seemed best. But that would be too obvious, the first place an enemy agent would look.

I sat looking at the bag for a moment, and then I remembered our old ice chest. I could put the bag in it and stow it somewhere cool, under the sink in the kitchen maybe, behind all the cleaners and polishers I never use.

That sounded good. I went through the kitchen to the backyard, into the laundry room, and rummaged through all the stuff Christine had left behind till I found the chest under some folding metal beach chairs she'd insisted on buying: I think we'd used them maybe twice. It was pretty small, but after I washed the cobwebs out, I figured I could squeeze the bag in. My bicycle lock and chain were hanging above the dryer, so I tossed them into the chest and went back inside.

I brought the bag into the kitchen to keep an eye on it as I dumped in the ice. A layer of cellophane to keep it from getting wet, and the bag just fit. I wrapped the chain around the chest a few times, tucked it into the cupboard behind the dishwasher soap, and locked the whole thing to the pipes under the sink. The key had rusted into the lock, but I finally worked it free and slipped it into my pocket. Then I closed the cupboard and went out into the front room.

The kids were still shouting outside. It was strange not hearing Bruce barking at them, and the thought came to me: maybe he barked at them because they were the enemy agents. . . .

I almost went to peer through the curtain, but I stopped myself. I'd done *my* part. If Bruce had wanted anything more, he should've made better plans than just dumping his custard into my lap at the last minute. I refused to worry about it, undid my tie, kicked off my shoes, and switched on the T.V.

Everything stayed quiet for the rest of the evening. A few times, I thought I heard noises in the kitchen, but the place was empty every time I looked. I decided that it was nerves and turned in at about ten o'clock. Getting to sleep wasn't too hard, actually; after all, Bruce had said that these alleged agents might not come.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But just after dawn, a crash slapped me awake. Metal and glass had smashed together somewhere, and I jumped up, thinking there'd been an accident out front. I grabbed my robe, rushed down the hall, and threw open the front door, ready to call the police if they were needed.

All I saw was the smoky blue of a pre-dawn August Saturday. I stood and blinked at it for a minute, then I heard another, smaller crash ring out behind me.

I turned and closed the door as glass shattered again. Another, and I realized that it was coming from the kitchen. I crept from the entryway into the front room and pushed at the kitchen door just enough to stick my head through.

The refrigerator was open, its pale light drifting over the counters, the cabinets, the linoleum, and these little shapes moving around on the floor. I wasn't thinking too clearly; I reached over and snapped on the lights.

About a dozen mice whirled around, some wearing little tool belts and standing up on the counters, the rest in the refrigerator itself. But the refrigerator door wasn't open: it had been pried off and was lying in a heap on the floor. Pickle jars and cardboard cartons lay shattered against it, and I could see a group of mice on the top shelf just about to toss something wrapped in aluminum foil out onto the floor.

Two seconds, maybe three, we stood that way, then the mice suddenly had guns in their paws. "*Get* him!" a voice squeaked, and they all swarmed toward me.

Now, I like mice. I'd had one as a pet when I was a kid. But mice with *guns* are a different matter. I turned, ran for my bedroom, slammed the door, and braced myself against it. I could hear little pops and yells from outside, and I started wondering whether mice could dig through wood.

Then I caught some movement across my bed at the window. The curtains parted in the early morning light, and a crow hopped through onto the windowsill. "Problem?" it asked.

I just stared. The crow flapped over to my bed, and another appeared on the sill. "We too late?" the second asked.

"Uhh," I said. "Too late for what?"

The second crow jumped onto my pillow, and a third winged in. "For mice," it said.

"Mice." I nodded. "With *guns*."

The crow on the sill made a rattling sound. "They're still only mice." It jumped onto the bed and cocked its head at the other two. "Ready?"

"Ready," they croaked.

The third looked back at me. "Open the door."

"*Open* it?" I could hear little scratchings and scrapings outside. "Are you crazy?!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Just *do* it." The crow spread its wings, and the other two did the same. "Stay here if you want."

So I pulled the door open. Out flashed the crows, their caws echoing in the hallway, and the shouts of the mice turned to screams. Pops went off, and everything started to smell like the Fourth of July. I slammed the door shut and crawled into bed; this was one more thing for my list of things not to think about. The sounds outside died away slowly, fell from a constant squeaking and scuffling to an occasional crash, pop, or shriek, and I fell back to sleep.

When I woke up after that, the sun was streaming through the window. The clock said 9:41, and I couldn't decide if I had dreamed the whole thing or not. But the firecracker smell still hung in the air, so I got dressed and opened the door.

The hallway looked all right—no mouse bodies, anyway—so I kept going through the entryway and into the front room.

There were the crows, all three of them, tearing up my sofa, fluff and fabric scattered all over the floor.

"Hey!" I tried to grab them, but they leaped up and screeched around the room. I threw myself onto what was left of the cushions and spread my arms out. "What do you think you're doing?!"

The crows settled slowly, one on top of the T.V., another on the back of my armchair. The third clattered down onto the coffee table, strutted to the highest stack of magazines, and cocked an eye at me. "Problem?" it asked.

"Problem?! Yes! Why are you tearing my sofa apart?!"

"You are concerned?" The crow hopped to the floor and ruffled its wings as the one from the T.V. landed next to it.

I couldn't keep a laugh from bursting out. "Concerned?! Why should I be concerned because three stinking birds are destroying my furniture?!"

The crow on my armchair flapped down to join the others. "Makes a bird think you might be *hiding* something in it."

"What?" I managed to get out, but by then they were all over me. Wings slapped my face, beaks jabbed my sides, claws scratched my arms, and I tripped over my own feet as I tried to jump up and away from them. Down onto the floor I rolled, snatches of Alfred Hitchcock movies flashing through the pricks and stings, and then I wasn't being hit anymore. I thumped against the coffee table just as more ripping sounds started from across the room.

After a minute, I peered from between my arms and saw the crows laying into the couch again. After another minute, I unfolded, crawled to the other side of the table and dropped shaking into my armchair. The crows didn't seem to notice; they were too busy pulling every bit of stuffing from the second of my three couch pillows.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They kept at it all morning; I couldn't even get breakfast. Every time I tried to stand, at least one of the crows would give a croak and snap its black eyes over to me.

And they took the whole sofa apart as the clock on my VCR slowly ticked past ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, noon, and one P.M. By 1:54 every bit of stuffing larger than a cotton ball had been pulled apart, only the smallest swatches of brown fabric remained unshredded, and they'd spent at least an hour poking around inside the empty framework, the whole time chattering and clicking to one another in low voices.

My stomach was chattering and clicking, too. So was my head. Whether I was in shock or not, I don't know; I'm not a doctor. But when you spend a few hours watching crows rip up your furniture, well, it does something to you.

At about two o'clock, all three jumped out onto the floor. "So," the one in front said, "it wasn't there."

I didn't know how to respond to this, so I didn't. The crows looked at me a while longer, then at each other. "Maybe we should try the chair," one suggested.

"No," said a new voice. "I don't think so."

They turned and I turned. Sitting in the entryway, the afternoon sun shining off the white swirls in its black fur, was the biggest cat I had ever seen. When I was growing up, we'd had a tabby named Bingo, and as she'd gotten older, she just seemed to expand into a throw pillow of a cat, bigger than some of the dogs in the neighborhood.

This cat was even *bigger*. It sauntered into the room, tail held aloft like a flag, settled a yard or so from the crows, and licked a front paw. "Two choices, birds," it said. "Either you *leave*," and the cat gave a grin that showed every one of its teeth, "or you have a bad day."

Things were quiet for a while, only the sound of the cat licking and a few cars going by outside breaking the afternoon stillness. Then one of the crows snapped its beak. "Balls!" it croaked, and leaped at the cat.

The cat just sort of flashed; it couldn't have moved as fast as it did, not a cat that big, but somehow, the crow was suddenly on the floor with the cat on top of it, the bird's head at a strange angle, something dark spreading in a puddle over the gold of my carpet. The cat stayed sprawled over the crow and licked at its paw for another moment, then it said, without looking up, "You birds. I want you gone."

The crows didn't wait; they were flapping down the hall to my bedroom before the cat finished speaking. "We'll be back!" I heard one screech, then the quiet closed in again.

The cat yawned. "Close that window back there, will ya?"

I stared down at it. "Yeah. Okay." I stumbled to the bedroom, slammed the window, and locked it, something I'd never done before. Somehow I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

got back to the front room and managed to fall into the chair instead of onto the floor.

The cat had gotten up from the crow and was poking at it with one paw. A shudder rustled every hair on its body. "I hate crows. You can't even *eat* 'em when you've killed 'em."

My stomach growled at the word "eat." The cat grinned. "You better get some food. We can talk while you make it."

I was in no state to argue, so I got up and pushed into the kitchen.

I'd forgotten that the mice had pulled the door off the refrigerator. The stink hit me like a fist. The milk they'd splashed was already sour, and everything else wasn't far behind.

The cat gave one look and wrinkled up its nose. "Guess we'll hafta go out, then."

"Out?" My stomach was knots. "What do you mean 'out'?"

The cat jerked a paw over its shoulder. "The A&W down the road. They make a good strawberry shake." It turned and started for the door.

I decided that that made as much sense as the rest. My car keys were jabbing at my leg, so I opened the front door for the cat, locked it behind us, and we went to the driveway.

The A&W had a take-out window, so I ordered lunch for myself and a milkshake for the cat. We parked under a tree there and ate, the cat pouring the shake bit by bit into the plastic lid and lapping it up.

I'd gotten about halfway through my burger when the cat said, "Y'know, you're not such a bad guy, Jim. Not everyone'd buy a strange cat a strawberry milkshake."

I swallowed. "Well, you did save my chair from those crows. I owe you something for that."

"Yeah, you do." Its tongue scraped against the plastic. "I'm Grendal, by the way."

I nodded. "Pleased to meet you."

Grendal shrugged and went on licking; I had finished my burger and most of my fries before he spoke again. "So, let's talk about the custard."

My fries tried to go down the wrong way. "Custard?" I managed to get out.

"Now, don't be that way, Jim; just hear me out." He brushed his whiskers. "I'm working a couple sides of the fence on this, and *one* of 'em, believe it or not, is yours." His eyes narrowed. "Hey, wait a minute. Where's your wife?"

"My wife?"

"Yeah. Christine, I think the name was."

"She's gone." I had to laugh. "She said I was too boring."

"Well, that's one good thing."

"Good? Excuse me, but I don't see much good in—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah, I'm sure you don't. But at least she won't end up a bargaining chip in all this." The cat took a few more licks of milkshake. "So here's the plan: we go back to your place, hang out, and get a little shut eye. I can keep the felines back till dawn, but after that, we'll hafta play it by ear. I know Bruce wouldn't leave an operation this tricky to an idiot, but you got any questions before we head back?"

"Hundreds," I said. "But I'm afraid if I ask them, you might give me answers."

The cat grinned. "You ready to go?"

I blew out a breath. "Yeah, okay." I wasn't sure I really trusted this cat, but at least he wasn't trying to shoot me or shred me. So I drove us home.

As we went up the front walk, Grendal said, "I'll go in first. Just to be on the safe side."

I shrugged and unlocked the door. Grendal stalked in, nose lifted, ears twitching forward and back, then stopped and scratched. "It's okay; c'mon in."

The stink was incredible. I left the door open and moved into the front room to push the windows up. The cat had settled on the carpet in the entryway; he gave me a look, then asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

"What does it look like?" I went past him and unlocked the door to the room Christine had used for her study. I hadn't been in there since she'd left, but it had windows, and this place needed a major airing out.

As I passed the cat in the entryway again, he said, "I don't think you get what's going on here, Jim."

"Look," I called back as I slid open the windows in my bedroom, "I am not going to have my house smell like a dump."

When I went back into the entryway, Grendal blocked my way. "You're willing to jeopardize this whole operation, open every door and window to whatever agents might be in this neighborhood, just so you can tidy up?"

I looked down. "Yes," was all I could think to say.

He shook his head. "You got more nerve than me."

"I've got no nerves left." I pushed into the kitchen and tied the door open with the chain Christine had attached to it; she'd put locks and chains on every door in the house, even the bathroom. Then she'd complained because no one ever tried to break in.

Glass crunched under my shoes, and I held my breath as I scooted past the refrigerator's remains and out into the yard. I got one of the trash cans from along the fence, took the broom and dustpan from the laundry room, grabbed some gloves, and set to work.

It took the rest of the afternoon. The refrigerator's motor had burned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out trying to keep the whole house cool, so not only had this little escapade cost me a sofa, a week's worth of food, and a good chunk of my peace of mind, but I was going to need a new refrigerator as well. Grendal came by every half hour to say that everything was quiet; he'd hauled the crow's body into the kitchen for me to toss in the trash with the rotted food, then had said he would be "patrolling the perimeter," whatever that meant.

By the time it was starting to get dusky outside, I'd hauled the door out, trashed all the food, swept up the glass, and mopped everything down. The ice chest was still chained to the pipes when I opened the cupboard under the sink to get the Pine Sol; I closed it before Grendal came back to report.

Grendal sat in the doorway as I washed the mop in the kitchen sink. "I've got to hand it to you," he said. "First the rotten food, and now this pine stench: no one's gonna be able to sniff out that custard in *this* house."

I hadn't thought of that, but I smiled at him and went to put the mop away.

We watched T.V. for a while, Grendal sprawled big as a sofa cushion in my lap. I made some soup for dinner and some popcorn, and Grendal helped with that: I'd never seen a cat eat popcorn before.

At about ten o'clock, the news came on, and I switched the set off. Grendal stirred, hefted himself from my legs, and thudded to the floor. "Well, I'd better get to work."

"Work? What's left to do?"

"Oh, nothing." He yawned. "Just convince my fellow felines not to creep in here while you sleep, tie you down, and slash squares from your skin till you tell them where the custard is. Shouldn't be *too* hard." He jumped onto the wreckage of the sofa and the windowsill above it. "Lock everything up. This ain't over yet." Then he was gone.

As I got up to close the window, I started wondering how I could properly thank Bruce for getting me involved in all this. Everything else was shut and locked, so I turned out the lights and got ready for bed.

It was a quiet night; I was awake for most of it. My list of things not to think about was growing by leaps and bounds, but trying not to think about them got harder and harder as the night wore on.

I finally did fall asleep, though, as images of various groups of animals chasing this bouncing sack back and forth over my crushed and bleeding body gave way to blank nothingness. Then there was a sudden weight on my chest and a slash at the side of my head. Fur filled my mouth, and a voice hissed, "Stop squirming, simian, or it gets nasty real fast."

I froze and managed to get my eyes open. Dawn glowed at the curtains again, and, in the dimness, I saw at least fifteen cats peering down at me, one of whom I recognized; Grendal was the mass on my chest and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the paws in my mouth. An axe-faced orange cat, one eye much darker than the other, cut between us and growled, "Grens had his chance. Now it's me." The cat held up a paw, blood glittering from his claws. "Let's talk *custard,* shall we?"

It sounded like a very good idea to me, but before I could even nod, my bedroom door burst open, and a voice yelled, "Don't move, any of you!"

They *all* moved, a shrieking, spitting storm of cats springing up above me. Grendal remained on my chest, the other cats swirling around him, then he took his paws from my mouth, gave me a wink, and bounded out the window. I heard more scuffling, shouts, and hisses; bundles streaked over me and through the curtains, and then things quieted down.

The light snapped on. Two men in black suits and dark glasses stood at my bedroom door. The shorter of the two stepped forward and held out a hand. "Mr. Carr? Sorry we couldn't get here earlier."

I blinked, sat up, took his hand, and shook it. He brushed at the cat hair on his jacket. "We usually let the lesser animals duke these things out amongst themselves, but we knew something big was going down when every single one of our informants mentioned this house and this weekend." He ran a hand through his short-cropped blond hair. "And the custard, of course."

My eyes had gotten used to the light, but the cat scratch on my face was starting to sting. I threw back the blankets to get up and get a band-aid, and both men had guns suddenly leveled on me. My hands went up, and I managed to squeak, "I'm just going to the bathroom!"

The blond man smiled tightly. "Force of habit," he said; they both tucked their guns away.

I got up more slowly, pulled on my pants, and stumped past them to the bathroom. "So who are *you* guys?"

"Interspecies Affairs." The short one seemed to be the talker; he flashed a vague badge shape at me from his wallet. "We try to keep the peace, keep the lesser animals in check." He blew out a breath. "For all it's worth. They just don't understand that if the truth got out, the whole system would crash down on top of them and they'd be right back out on the streets. They just keep *pushing;* your own dog seems to be the leader of some sort of insurgent front."

"Imagine that," I mumbled, laying a band-aid over the gash on my cheek. It wasn't as big as it felt.

"But their tribal rivalries keep them from cooperating in any real organized effort; it's all instinct with them, you know." He tapped his head and smiled. "We control things pretty easily." His smile got thinner. "So if you'll just hand over the custard, we'll be on our way."

I splashed some water on my face while I tried to think. "Why does

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

everything keep coming back to this custard? What does it have to do with anything?"

"We don't know," the man said evenly. "But if *they* all want it, *we* have to get it first." He lowered his voice. "It's a war, Mr. Carr, a war no one but us knows about. We give them food, shelter, a life style they couldn't even dream of in the wild, and how do they *repay* us?" His face was going red, veins shivering in his neck. "Dirtying our homes and cars! Running loose in the streets! Barking and scratching, chittering and twittering, hissing and howling all day and all night! And now this whole *custard* thing!" He held up a fist. "If I had *my* way, I'd line 'em all up, get me an *Uzi,* and—"

The taller man put a hand on the short man's shoulder; he shuddered and straightened up. "We've got to keep ahead of them," he said after a moment, "so if you'll hand over the custard, please."

I decided then that I had taken all I was going to take. "Can I get some coffee first? I'm still a little shaken up."

"I understand," the short man said. "War's not pretty."

I led them into the front room and gestured to the chairs. "I'll just be a minute. Can I get you anything?"

"Only the custard." Another thin smile, and he settled into my armchair. I smiled back, pushed into the kitchen, let the door swing shut, then bolted it and latched the chain.

I fell to my knees and pulled open the cupboard under the sink. The key was still in my pocket, and I wrestled it till the lock came undone. I dragged the ice chest out, got a plate, dumped the custard onto it, and dug in, face first.

By this time, I could hear the short man calling my name. That was followed by a knocking at the door, then a pounding. I continued to eat. It was pretty good custard, but there was a *lot* of it; I had barely finished when they battered the door open and sprang in, their guns drawn.

Custard clung cold and hard to my face and chest, and for a minute, I was sure they were going to shoot; the veins in the short man's neck were twitching again. But the taller man tucked his gun away and put a hand on his partner's shoulder. After another few seconds, the short man gave a strangled sort of sigh and snapped his gun back into his jacket. I licked the custard from my fingers.

It took him a minute to find his voice. "If this wasn't all so covert, I'd shoot you down like the traitor to your species you are." I could almost see his eyes glowing behind his dark glasses. "You symps make me sick."

I shrugged. "What can I say? I like custard."

He took a step toward me, but his partner again grabbed his shoulder. The blond man glared at me, then choked out, "When everything hits the fan, mister, don't you come crying to *me!* When that dog of yours

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stops wagging his tail and *turns* on you, you'll remember me! And then it'll be *too late!* You hear me?! Too late!" He shouldered past the taller man and stormed into the front room; I heard the door crash as he threw it open.

The tall man looked at me for a second or two, then pulled down his dark glasses, gave me a wink, turned, and walked out.

I spent the rest of the day cleaning up the remains of the sofa: breaking up the framework and setting it out by the back gate, vacuuming up the fuzz and fabric, and trying to find a way to set the remaining furniture in some sort of balance. I finally got one I liked, and was heating up another dinner of soup, when I heard the door open. Bruce came bounding into the kitchen, a big grin on his face. "Jim! Miss me?"

"You!" I tried to shout angrily, but he leaped up and covered my face with licks; I finally pushed him down and got out: "What's been going on here?!"

His eyes were dancing as he looked around. "I like what you've done with the front room, but where's the refrigerator?"

"Mice!" I blurted out. "With guns! And crows! And cats! And—"

"Oh, so they showed up, huh? Grendal get through okay?"

"I don't know! I don't know anything! How *could* you—"

"Grendal did show up, didn't he?"

"Yes! He was the only one who didn't try to kill me. At least, not at first!"

"Good, good." He looked around again, his tongue lolling out. "So, where's the custard?"

I'd been waiting for that question. "I *ate* it! You hear me?! I will not be a pawn in anyone's little game! I ate your whole stinking custard!"

Bruce nodded. "I was hoping you would; it'd probably be a little stale by now, anyway."

I stared at him.

He gave a panting sort of laugh. "See, we had to get everyone's attention focused somewhere *else,* so our real plan could come off. We got this whole custard thing circulating, and it worked like a charm. You were terrific."

For a minute or two I could only blink. "You . . . you mean it was . . . was all a *front?* All phony? You . . . I . . . you . . . you could've gotten me killed!"

"Yeah, I'm sorry about that. It got a little hairier than we thought." He was all grins. "But, hey, it worked!"

"*What* worked? What were you doing?! What's been going *on* this weekend?!"

"Woof," Bruce said.

"*What?!*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Woof," he repeated.

I made him sleep outside that night. When I let him in the next morning, he dropped an envelope at my feet, gave a few licks at his water dish, then went into the front room. I picked up the envelope, and there were eleven one hundred dollar bills inside. It was just enough for a new refrigerator and sofa, and the little that was left rented a carpet cleaner to get rid of the spot of crow's blood.

I put the whole adventure on my list of things not to think about, and let him sleep in my room again. He did pay for the damage, after all. And what good does it do to hold a grudge?

Especially against your own *dog*. ●

AT THE PET SHOP

The iceworm was cold and sinuous
and Yuli wanted one for his own
despite the possibility of frostbites.
I said no the cryogenic upkeep
is astronomical and we moved on.
There was a crystal thing that sang
in a clear cubicle as we approached.
Piezoelectric I said it can't be alive
but Yuli tapped the wall of the cube
and the crystal became liquescent
and flowed to his fingertips
like a macroscopic amoeba.
It crystallized and sang again, a chorus
of mechanical crickets. But the price
was out of this world and we moved on.
We tried to ignore the scrannel cries
of the harpies from Alcor
and the stench of bromine vapor
from a thing that burped incessantly,
but even Yuli was getting jumpy.
We settled for a mynah bird from Terra
that Yuli had read about.
They're incredible mimics and polyglots
he told me but I was a bit skeptical.
Imagine my surprise when the damned thing
began repeating Yuli's nonsense phrases
in perfect Pangalactic!

—Keith Allen Daniels

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TRAVEL THROUGH THE UNIVERSE WITH ANALOG

Each issue of Analog Science Fiction & Fact blazes the way to bold new discoveries. The stories in Analog begin with a scientific base that stretches beyond your imagination. Start your subscription today and travel to distant places and times where fiction becomes fact.

Subscribe today and save over 34% off the newsstand price.

- ❑ Please send me 18 issues for $30.97 I save over 34% off the newsstand price
- ❑ Please send me 12 issues for only $22.97
- ❑ Check enclosed
- ❑ Please bill me

MAIL TO

ANALOG
PO Box 5133
Harlan, IA 51593

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Outside US & Poss. 12 for $27.97, 18 for $39.97. Price includes GST. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in US funds. We publish 2 double issues, in January and July. Each double issue counts as 2 issues towards your subscription.

M8SC-1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A MARTIAN CHILDHOOD

Kim Stanley Robinson

After far too long an absence, Kim Stanley Robinson returns to our pages with the beautifully drawn tale of a boy making his way through "A Martian Childhood." The self-contained novella is also the first chapter in *Green Mars*—an April 1994 Bantam/Spectra release. Last year, Mr. Robinson's highly acclaimed novel, *Red Mars*, was a Hugo-Award finalist and the author is currently at work on *Blue Mars*—the last book in his Martian trilogy.

art: Alan M. Clark

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One day the sky fell. Plates of ice crashed into the lake, and then started thumping on the beach. The children scattered like frightened sandpipers. Nirgal ran over the dunes to the village and burst into the greenhouse, shouting "The sky is falling, the sky is falling!" Peter sprinted out the doors and across the dunes faster than Nirgal could follow.

Back on the beach great panes of ice stabbed the sand, and some chunks of dry ice fizzed in the water of the lake. When the children were all clumped around him Peter stood with his head craned back, staring at the dome so far above. "Back to the village," he said in his no-nonsense tone. On the way there he laughed. "The sky is falling!" he squeaked, tousling Nirgal's hair. Nirgal blushed and Dao and Jackie laughed, their frosted breath shooting out in quick white plumes.

Peter was one of those who climbed the side of the dome to repair it. He and Kasei and Michel spidered over the village in sight of all, over the beach and then the lake until they were smaller than children, hanging in slings from ropes attached to icehooks. They sprayed the flaw in the dome with water until it froze into a new clear layer, coating the white dry ice. When they came down they talked of the warming world outside. Hiroko had come out of her little bamboo stand by the lake to watch, and Nirgal said to her, "Will we have to leave?"

"We will always have to leave," Hiroko said. "Nothing on Mars will last."

But Nirgal liked it under the dome. In the morning he woke in his own round bamboo room, high in Creche Crescent, and ran down to the frosty dunes with Jackie and Rachel and Frantz and the other early risers. He saw Hiroko on the far shore, walking the beach like a dancer, floating over her own wet reflection. He wanted to go to her but it was time for school.

They went back to the village and crowded into the schoolhouse coatroom, hanging up their down jackets and standing with their blue hands stretched over the heating grate, waiting for the day's teacher. It could be Dr. Robot and they would be bored senseless, counting his blinks like the seconds on the clock. It could be the Good Witch, old and ugly, and then they would be back outside building all day, exuberant with the joy of tools. Or it could be the Bad Witch, old and beautiful, and they would be stuck before their lecterns all morning trying to think in Russian, in danger of a rap on the hand if they giggled or fell asleep. The Bad Witch had silver hair and a fierce glare and a hooked nose, like the ospreys that lived in the pines by the lake. Nirgal was afraid of her.

So like the others he concealed his dismay as the school door opened and the Bad Witch walked in. But on this day she seemed tired, and let them out on time even though they had done poorly at arithmetic. Nirgal followed Jackie and Dao out of the schoolhouse and around the corner,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the alley between Creche Crescent and the back of the kitchen. Dao peed against the wall and Jackie pulled down her pants to show she could too, and just then Bad Witch came around the corner. She pulled them all out of the alley by the arm, Nirgal and Jackie clutched together in one of her talons, and right out in the plaza she spanked Jackie while shouting furiously at the boys. "You two stay away from her! She's your sister!" Jackie, crying and twisting to pull up her pants, saw Nirgal looking at her, and she tried to hit him and Maya with the same furious swing, and fell over bare-bottomed and howled.

It wasn't true that Jackie was their sister. There were twelve sansei or third-generation children in Zygote, and they knew each other like brothers and sisters and many of them were, but not all. It was confusing and seldom discussed. Jackie and Dao were the oldest, Nirgal a season younger, the rest bunched a season after that: Rachel, Emily, Ruell, Steve, Simud, Nanedi, Tiu, Frantz, and Huo Hsing. Hiroko was mother to everyone in Zygote, but not really—only to Nirgal and Dao and six other of the sansei, and several of the nisei grownups as well. Children of the mother goddess.

But Jackie was Esther's daughter. Esther had moved away after a fight with Kasei, who was Jackie's father. Not many of them knew who their fathers were. Once Nirgal had been crawling over a dune after a crab when Esther and Kasei had loomed overhead, Esther crying and Kasei shouting "If you're going to leave me then leave!" He had been crying too. He had a pink stone eyetooth. He too was a child of Hiroko's; so Jackie was Hiroko's granddaughter. That was how it worked. Jackie had long black hair and was the fastest runner in Zygote, except for Peter. Nirgal could run the longest, and sometimes ran around the lake three or four times in a row, just to do it, but Jackie was faster in the sprints. She laughed all the time. If Nirgal ever argued with her she would say "All right Uncle Nirgie," and laugh at him. She was his niece, although a season older. But not his sister.

The school door crashed open and there was Coyote, teacher for the day. Coyote traveled all over the world, and spent very little time in Zygote. It was a big day when he taught them. He led them around the village finding odd things to do, but all the time he made one of them read aloud, from books impossible to understand, written by philosophers, who were dead people. Bakunin, Nietzsche, Mao, Bookchin—these people's comprehensible thoughts lay like unexpected pebbles on a long beach of gibberish. The stories Coyote had them read from the Odyssey or the Bible were easier to understand, though unsettling, as the people in them killed each other a lot and Hiroko said it was wrong. Coyote laughed at Hiroko and he often howled for no obvious reason as they read these gruesome tales, and asked them hard questions about what they had heard, and argued with them as if they knew what they were talking about, which was disconcerting. "What would *you* do? Why would you do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that?" All the while teaching them how the Rickover's fuel recycler worked, or making them check the plunger hydraulics on the lake's wave machine, until their hands went from blue to white, and their teeth chattered so much they couldn't talk clearly. "You kids sure get cold easy," he said. "All but Nirgal."

Nirgal was good with cold. He knew intimately all its many stages, and he did not dislike the feel of it. People who disliked cold did not understand that one could adjust to it, that its bad effects could all be dealt with by a sufficient push from within. Nirgal was very familiar with heat as well. If you pushed heat out hard enough, then cold only became a sort of vivid shocking envelope in which you moved. And so cold's ultimate effect was as a stimulant, making you want to run.

"Hey Nirgal, what's the air temperature?"

"Two seventy-one."

Coyote's laugh was scary, an animal cackle that included all the noises anything could make. Different every time, too. "Here, let's stop the wave machine and see what the lake looks like flat."

The water of the lake was always liquid, while the water ice coating the underside of the dome had to stay frozen. This explained most of their mesocosmic weather, as Sax put it, giving them their mists and sudden winds, their rain and fog and occasional snow. On this day the weather machine was almost silent, the big hemisphere of space under the dome nearly windless. With the wave machine turned off, the lake soon settled down to a round flat plate. The surface of the water became the same white color as the dome, but the lake bottom, covered by green algae, was still visible through the white sheen. So the lake was simultaneously pure white and dark green. On the far shore the dunes and scrub pines were reflected upside-down in this two-toned water, as perfectly as in any mirror. Nirgal stared at the sight, entranced, everything falling away, nothing there but this pulsing green/white vision. He saw: there were two worlds, not one—two worlds in the same space, both visible, separate and different but collapsed together, so that they were visible as two only at certain angles. Push at vision's envelope, push like one pushed against the envelope of cold: *push!* Such colors! . . .

"Mars to Nirgal, Mars to Nirgal!"

They laughed at him. He was always doing that, they told him. Going off. His friends were fond of him, he saw that in their faces. Coyote broke chips of flat ice from the strand, then skipped them across the lake. All of them did the same, until the intersecting white-green ripples made the upside-down world shiver and dance. "Look at that!" Coyote shouted. Between throws he chanted, in his bouncing English that was like a perpetual song: "You kids are living the best lives in history, most people are just fluid in the great world machine, and here you're in on the birth of a world! *Un*believable! But it's pure luck you know, no credit to you, not until you do something with it, you could have been born in a mansion, a jail, a shanty town in Port of Spain, but here you are in Zygote, the secret heart of Mars! Course just now you're down here like moles in a hole,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with vultures above all ready to eat you, but the day it's coming when you walk this planet free of every bond. You remember what I'm telling you, it's prophecy my children! And meanwhile look how fine it is, this little ice paradise."

He threw a chip straight at the dome, and they all chanted Ice Paradise! Ice Paradise! Ice Paradise! until they were helpless with laughter.

But that night Coyote spoke to Hiroko, when he thought no one was listening. "Roko, you got to take those kids outside, and show them the world. Even if it's only under the fog hood. They're like moles in a hole down here, for Christ's sake." Then he was gone again, who knew where, off on one of his mysterious journeys into that other world folded over them.

Some days Hiroko came in to the village to teach them. These to Nirgal were the best days of all. She always took them down to the beach; and going to the beach with Hiroko was like being touched by a god. It was her world—the green world inside the white—and she knew everything about it, and when she was there the subtle pearly colors of sand and dome pulsed with both worlds' colors at once, pulsed as if trying to break free of what held them.

They sat on the dunes, watching the shore birds skitter and peep as they charged together up and down the strand. Gulls wheeled overhead and Hiroko asked them questions, her black eyes twinkling merrily. She lived by the lake with a small group of her intimates, Iwao, Rya, Gene, Evgenia, all in a little bamboo stand in the dunes. And she spent a lot of time visiting other hidden sanctuaries around the South Pole. So she always needed catching up on the village news. She was a slender woman, tall for one of the issei, as neat as the shorebirds in her dress and her movement. She was old, of course, impossibly ancient like all the issei, but with something in her manner which made her seem younger than even Peter or Kasei—just a little bit older than the kids, in fact, with everything in the world new before her, pushing to break into all its colors.

"Look at the pattern this seashell makes. The dappled whorl, curving inward to infinity. That's the shape of the universe itself. There's a constant pressure, pushing toward pattern. A tendency in matter to evolve into ever more complex forms. It's a kind of pattern gravity, a holy greening power we call viriditas, and it is the driving force in the cosmos. Like this, you see. Like these sand fleas and limpets and krill—although these krill in particular are dead, and helping the fleas. Like all of us," waving a hand like a dancer. "And because we are alive, the universe must be said to be alive. We are its consciousness as well as our own. We rise out of the cosmos and we see its mesh of patterns, and it strikes us as beautiful. And that feeling is the most important thing in all the universe—its culmination, like the color of the flower at first bloom on a wet morning. It's a holy feeling, and our task in this world is to do everything we can to foster it. And one way to do that is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to spread life everywhere. To aid it into existence where it was not before, as here on Mars."

This to her was the supreme act of love, and when she talked about it, even if they didn't fully understand, they felt the love. Another push, another kind of warmth in the envelope of cold. She touched them as she talked, and they dug for shells as they listened. "Mud clam! Antarctic limpet. Glass sponge, watch out—it can cut you." It made Nirgal happy just to look at her.

And one morning, as they stood from their dig to do more beachcombing, she returned his gaze, and he recognized her expression—it was precisely the expression on his face when he looked at her, he could feel it in his muscles. So he made her happy too! Which was intoxicating.

He held her hand as they walked the beach. "It's a simple ecology in some ways," she said as they knelt to inspect another clam shell. "Not many species, and the food chains are short. But so rich. So beautiful." She tested the temperature of the lake with her hand. "See the mist? The water must be warm today."

By this time she and Nirgal were alone, the other kids running around the dunes or up and down the strand. Nirgal bent down to touch a wave as it stalled out next to their feet, leaving behind a white lace of foam. "It's two seventy-five and a little over."

"You're so sure."

"I can always tell."

"Here," she said, "do I have a fever?"

He reached up and held her neck. "No, you're cool."

"That's right. I'm always about half a degree low. Vlad and Ursula can't figure out why."

"It's because you're happy."

Hiroko laughed, looking just like Jackie, suffused with joy. "I love you, Nirgal."

Inside he warmed as if a heating grate were in there. Half a degree at least. "And I love you."

And they walked down the beach hand in hand, silently following the sandpipers.

Coyote returned, and Hiroko said to him, "Okay. Let's take them outside."

And so the next morning when they met for school, Hiroko and Coyote and Peter led them through the locks and down the long white tunnel that connected the dome to the outside world. At its far end were located the hangar, and the cliff gallery above it. They had run the gallery with Peter in the past, looking out the little polarized windows at the icy sand and the pink sky, trying to see the great wall of dry ice that they stood in—the south polar cap, the bottom of the world, which they lived in to escape the notice of people who would put them in jail.

Because of that they had always stayed inside the gallery. But on this day they went into the hangar locks and put on tight elastic jumpers,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rolling up sleeves and legs; then heavy boots, and tight gloves, and last helmets, with bubble windows on their front side. Getting more excited every moment, until the excitement became something very like fright, especially when Simud started crying and insisting she didn't want to go. Hiroko calmed her with a long touch. "Come on. I'll be there with you."

They huddled together speechlessly as the adults herded them into the lock. There was a hissing noise, and then the outer door opened. Clutching the adults they walked cautiously outside, bumping together as they moved.

It was too bright to see. They were in a swirling white mist. The ground was dotted with intricate ice flowers, all aglint in the bath of light. Nirgal was holding Hiroko and Coyote by the hand, and they propelled him forward and let go of his hands. He staggered in the onslaught of white glare. "This is the fog hood," Hiroko's voice said over an intercom in his ear. "It lasts through the winter. But now it's Ls 205, springtime, when the green force pushes hardest through the world, fueled by the sun's light. See it!"

He could see nothing but it: a white coalescing fireball. Sudden sunlight pierced this ball, transforming it into a spray of color, turning the frosty sand to shaved magnesium, the ice flowers to incandescent jewels. The wind pushed at his side and rent the fog; gaps in it appeared, and the land gaped off into the distance, making him reel. So big! So big—everything was so big—he went to one knee on the sand, put his hands on his other leg to keep his balance. The rocks and ice flowers around his boots glowed as if under a microscope. The rocks were dotted with round scales of black and green lichen.

Out on the horizon was a low flat-topped hill. A crater. There in the gravel was a rover track, nearly filled with frost, as if it had been there a million years. Pattern pulsing in the chaos of light and rock, green lichen pushing into the white. . . .

Everyone was talking at once. The other children were beginning to race around giddily, shrieking with delight as the fog opened up and gave them a glimpse of the dark pink sky. Coyote was laughing hard. "They're like winter calves let out of the barn in spring, look at them tripping, oh you poor dear things, ah ha ha, Roko, this is no way to make them live," cackling as he lifted kids off the sand and set them on their feet again.

Nirgal stood, bounced experimentally. He felt he might float away, he was glad the boots were so heavy. There was a long mound, shoulder high, snaking away from the ice cliff. Jackie was walking its crest and he ran to join her, staggering at the incline, at the jumbled rock on the ground. He got onto the ridge and got into his running rhythm, and it felt like he was flying, like he could run forever.

He stood by her side. They looked back at the ice cliff, and shouted with a fearful joy; it rose up forever into the fog. A shaft of morning light poured over them like molten water. They turned away, unable to face

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it. Blinking away floods of tears, Nirgal saw his shadow cast against the fog scraping over the rocks below them. The shadow was surrounded by a bright circular band of rainbow light. He shouted loudly and Coyote raced up to them, his voice in Nirgal's ear crying, "What's wrong! What is it?"

He stopped when he saw the shadow. "Hey, it's a glory! That's called a glory. It's like the Spectre of the Brocken. Wave your arms up and down! Look at the colors! Christ almighty, aren't you the lucky ones."

On an impulse Nirgal moved to Jackie's side, and their glories merged, becoming a single nimbus of glowing rainbow colors, surrounding their blue double shadow. Jackie laughed with delight and went off to try it with Peter.

2.

About a year later Nirgal and the other children began to figure out how to deal with the days when they were taught by Sax. He would start at the blackboard, sounding like a particularly characterless AI, and behind his back they would roll their eyes and make faces as he droned on about partial pressures or infrared rays. Then one of them would see an opening and begin the game. He was helpless before it. He would say something like, "In non-shivering thermogenesis the body produces heat using futile cycles," and one of them would raise a hand and say "But why, Sax?" and everyone would stare hard at their lecterns and not look at each other, while Sax would frown as if this had never happened before, and say, "Well, it creates heat without using as much energy as shivering does. The muscle proteins contract, but instead of grabbing they just slide over each other, and that creates the heat."

Jackie, so sincerely the whole class nearly lost it: "But how?"

He was blinking now, so fast they almost exploded watching him. "Well, the amino acids in the proteins have broken covalent bonds, and the breaks release what is called bond dissociation energy."

"But why?"

Blinking ever harder: "Well, that's just a matter of physics." He diagrammed vigorously on the blackboard: "Covalent bonds are formed when two atomic orbitals merge to form a single bond orbital, occupied by electrons from both atoms. Breaking the bond releases thirty to a hundred k cals of stored energy."

Several of them asked, in chorus, "But *why?*"

This got him into sub-atomic physics, where the chain of whys and becauses could go on for a half hour without him ever once saying something they could understand. Finally they would sense they were near the end game. "But why?"

"Well," going cross-eyed as he tried to backtrack, "Atoms want to get to their stable number of electrons, and they'll share electrons when they have to."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*But why?*"

Now he was looking trapped. "That's just the way atoms bond. One of the ways."

"But *WHY?*"

A shrug. "That's how the atomic force works. That's how things came out—"

And they all would shout, "*in the Big Bang.*"

They would howl with glee, and Sax's forehead would knot up as he realized that they had done it to him again. He would sigh, and go back to where he had been when the game began. But every time they started it again, he never seemed to remember, as long as the initial Why was plausible enough. And even when he did recognize what was happening, he seemed helpless to stop it. His only defense was to say, with a little frown, "Why *what?*" That slowed the game for a while; but then Nirgal and Jackie got clever at guessing what in any statement most deserved a why, and as long as they could do that, Sax seemed to feel it was his job to continue answering, right on up the chains of because to the Big Bang, or, every once in a while, to a muttered "We don't know."

"We don't know!" the class would exclaim in mock dismay. "Why *not?*"

"It's not explained," he would say, frowning. "Not yet."

And so the good mornings with Sax would pass; and both he and the kids seemed to agree that these were better than the bad mornings, when he would drone on uninterrupted, and protest "This is really a very important matter" as he turned from the blackboard and saw a crop of heads laid out snoring on the desktops.

One morning, thinking about Sax's frown, Nirgal stayed behind in the school until he and Sax were the only ones left, and then he said, "Why don't you like it when you can't say why?"

The frown returned. After a long silence Sax said slowly, "I try to understand. I pay attention to things, you see, very closely. As closely as I can. Concentrating on the specificity of every moment. And I want to understand why it happens the way it does. I'm curious. And I think that everything happens for a reason. Everything. So, we should be able to tease these reasons out. When we can't . . . well. I don't like it. It vexes me. Sometimes I call it—" he glanced at Nirgal shyly, and Nirgal saw that he had never told this to anyone before—"I call it the Great Unexplainable."

It was the white world, Nirgal saw suddenly. The white world inside the green, the opposite of Hiroko's green world inside the white. And they had opposite feelings about them. Looking from the green side, when Hiroko confronted something mysterious, she loved it and it made her happy—it was viriditas, a holy power. Looking from the white side, when Sax confronted something mysterious, it was the Great Unexplainable, dangerous and awful. He was interested in the true, while Hiroko was interested in the real. Or perhaps it was the other way

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around—those words were tricky. Better to say she loved the green world, he the white.

"But yes!" Michel said when Nirgal mentioned this observation to him. "Very good, Nirgal. Your sight has such insight. In archetypal terminologies we might call green and white the Mystic and the Scientist. Both extremely powerful figures, as you see. But what we need, if you ask me, is a combination of the two, which we call the *Alchemist*."

The green and the white.

Afternoons the children were free to do what they wanted, and sometimes they stayed with the day's teacher, but more often they ran on the beach or played in the village, which lay nestled in its cluster of low hills, halfway between the lake and the tunnel entrance. They climbed the spiraling staircases of the big bamboo treehouses, and played hide-and-seek among the stacked rooms and the daughter shoots and the hanging bridges connecting them. The bamboo dorms made a crescent which held most of the rest of the village inside it; each of the big shoots was five or seven segments high, each segment a room, getting smaller as they got higher. The children each had rooms of their own in the top segments of the shoots—windowed vertical cylinders that were four or five steps across, like the towers of the castles in their stories. Below them in the middle segments the adults had their rooms, mostly alone but sometimes in couples; and the bottom segments were living rooms. From the windows of their top rooms they looked down on the village rooftops, clustered in the circle of hills and bamboo and greenhouses like mussels in the lake shallows.

On the beach they hunted shells or played German dodgeball, or shot arrows across the dunes into blocks of foam. Usually Jackie and Dao chose the games, and led the teams if there were teams. Nirgal and the younger ones followed them, cycling through their various friendships and hierarchies, which were honed endlessly in the daily play. As little Frantz once crudely explained it to Nadia, "Dao hits Nirgal; Nirgal hits me; I hit the girls." Often Nirgal got tired of that game, which Dao always won, and for better fun he would take off running around the lake, slowly and steadily, falling into a rhythm which seemed to encompass everything in the world. He could circle the lake for as long as the day lasted when he got in that rhythm. It was a joy, an exhilaration, just to run and run and run and run. . . .

Under the dome it was always cold, but the light was perpetually changing. In summer the dome glowed bluish white all the time, and pencils of lit air stood under the skylight shafts. In winter it was dark, and the dome flared with reflected lamplight, like the inside of a mussel shell. In spring and fall the light would dim in the afternoon to a gray and ghostly dusk, the colors only suggested by the many shades of gray, the bamboo leaves and pine needles all ink strokes against the faint white of the dome. In those hours the greenhouses were like big fairy lamps on the hills, and the kids would wander home criss-crossing like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gulls, and head for the bathhouse. There in the long building beside the kitchen they would pull off their clothes and run into the steamy clangor of the big main bath, sliding around on the bottom tiles feeling heat buzz back into their hands and feet and faces, as they splashed friskily around the soaking ancients, with their turtle faces and their wrinkled hairy bodies.

After that warm wet hour they dressed, and trooped into the kitchen, damp and pink-skinned, queueing up and filling their plates, sitting at the long tables, scattered among the adults. There were 124 permanent residents, but usually about 200 people there at any given time. When everyone was seated they took up the water pitchers and poured each others' water, and then they tore into the hot food with gusto, downing potatoes, tortillas, pasta, tabouli, bread, a hundred kinds of vegetables, occasionally fish or chicken. After the meal the adults would talk about crops or their Rickover, an old integral fast reactor they were very fond of, or about Earth—while the kids cleaned up and then played music for an hour and then games, as everyone began the slow process of falling asleep.

One day before dinner a group of twenty-two people arrived from around the polar cap. Their little dome had lost its ecosystem to what Hiroko called spiraling complex disequilibrium, and their reserves had run out. They needed sanctuary.

Hiroko put them in three of the newly mature treehouses. They climbed the staircases spiraling up the outsides of the fat round shoots, exclaiming at the cylindrical segments with their doors and windows cut into them. Hiroko put them to work finishing construction on new rooms, and building a new greenhouse at the edge of the village. It was obvious to all that Zygote was not growing as much food as they now needed. The kids ate as modestly as they could, imitating the adults. "Should have called the place Gamete," Coyote said to Hiroko on his next time through, laughing harshly.

She only waved him away. But perhaps worry accounted for Hiroko's more distant air. She spent all her days in the greenhouses at work, and seldom taught the children anymore. When she did they only followed her around and worked for her, harvesting or turning compost or weeding. "She *doesn't* care about us," Dao said angrily one afternoon as they walked down the beach. He directed his complaint at Nirgal. "She isn't really our mother anyway." He led them all to the labs by the tunnel hill greenhouse, chivvying them along as he could so well.

Inside he pointed to a row of fat magnesium tanks, something like refrigerators. "*Those* are our mothers. That's what we were grown inside. Kasei told me, and I asked Hiroko and it's true. We're ectogenes. We weren't born, we were *decanted*." He glared triumphantly at his frightened, fascinated little band; then he struck Nirgal full on the chest with his fist, knocking Nirgal clear across the lab, and left with a curse. "We don't have parents."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Extra visitors were a burden now, but still when they came there was a lot of excitement, and many people stayed up most of the first night of a visit, talking, getting all the news they could of the other sanctuaries. There was a whole network of these in the south polar region; Nirgal had a map in his lectern, with red dots to show all thirty-four. And Nadia and Hiroko guessed that there were more, in other networks to the north, or in complete isolation. But as they all kept radio silence, there was no way to be sure. So news was at a premium—it was usually the most precious thing that visitors had, even if they came laden with gifts, which they usually did, giving out whatever they had managed to make or obtain that their hosts would find useful.

During these visits Nirgal would listen hard to the nights' long animated conversations, sitting on the floor or wandering and refilling people's teacups. He felt acutely that he did not understand the rules of the world; it was inexplicable to him why people acted as they did. Of course he did understand the basic fact of the situation—that there were two sides, locked in a contest for control of Mars—that there had been a revolution which had failed, forcing the surviving revolutionaries to go into hiding—that the surface of Mars was now in the control of Terrans who were ripping the planet apart to suit their own ideas—that Zygote was the leader for the side that was right—and that eventually the areophany would triumph. It was a tremendous feeling to be involved in that struggle, to be a crucial part of the story, and it often left him sleepless when he dragged off to bed, his mind dancing through to dawn with visions of all he would contribute to this great drama, amazing Jackie and everyone else in Zygote.

Sometimes, in his desire to learn more, he even eavesdropped. He did it by lying on a couch in the corner and staring at a lectern, doodling or pretending to read. Quite often people elsewhere in the room didn't realize he was listening, and sometimes they would even talk about the children of Zygote—mostly when he was actually skulking out in the hall.

"Have you noticed most of them are left-handed?"

"Hiroko tweaked their genes, I swear."

"She says not."

"They're already almost as tall as I am."

"That's just the gravity. I mean look at Peter and the rest of the nisei. They're natural born, and they're mostly tall. But the left-handedness, that's got to be genetic."

"Once she told me there was a simple transgenic insertion that would increase the size of the corpus callosum. Maybe she fooled with that and got the lefthandedness as a side effect."

"I thought lefthandedness was caused by brain damage."

"No one knows. I think even Hiroko is mystified by it."

"I can't believe she would mess with the chromosomes for brain development."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ectogenes, remember—better access."

"Their bone density is poor, I hear."

"That's right. They'd be in trouble on Earth. They're on supplements to help."

"That's the g again. It's trouble for all of us, really."

"Tell me about it. I broke my forearm swinging a tennis racket."

"Lefthanded giant bird-people, that's what we're growing down here. It's bizarre if you ask me. You see them running across the dunes and expect them to just take off and fly."

That night Nirgal had the usual trouble sleeping. Ectogenes, transgenic . . . it made him feel odd. White and green in their double helix . . . For hours he tossed, wondering what the uneasiness twisting through him meant, wondering what he *should* feel.

Finally, exhausted, he fell asleep. And in his sleep he had a dream. All his dreams before that night had been about Zygote, but now he dreamed that he flew in the air, over the surface of Mars. Vast red canyons cut the land, and volcanoes reared nearly to his unimaginable height. But something was after him, something much bigger and faster than him, with wings that flapped loudly as the creature dropped out of the sun, with huge talons that extended toward him. He pointed at this flying creature and bolts of lightning shot out of his fingertips, causing it to bank away. It was soaring up for another attack when he struggled awake, his fingers pulsing and his heart thumping like the wave machine, ka-*thunk,* ka-*thunk,* ka-*thunk.*

The very next afternoon the wave machine was waving too well, as Jackie put it. They were playing on the beach, and thought they had the big breakers gauged, but then a really big one surged over the ice filigree and knocked Nirgal to his knees, and pulled him back down the strand with an irresistible sucking. He struggled, gasping for air as he tumbled in the shockingly icy water, but he couldn't escape and was pulled under, then rolled hard in the rush of the next incoming wave.

Jackie grabbed him by the arm and hair, pulled him back up the strand with her. Dao helped them to their feet, crying "Are you okay are you okay?" If they got wet the rule was to run for the village as fast as they could, so Nirgal and Jackie struggled to their feet and raced over the dunes and up the village path, the rest of the children trailing far behind. The wind cut to the bone. They ran straight to the bathhouse and burst through the doors and stripped off their stiff garments with shaking hands, helped by Nadia and Sax and Michel and Rya, who had been in there bathing.

As they were being hustled into the shallows of the big communal bath, Nirgal remembered his dream. He said "Wait, wait."

The others stopped, confused. He closed his eyes, held his breath. He clutched Jackie's cold upper arm. He saw himself back into the dream, felt himself swimming through the sky. Heat from the fingertips. The white world in the green.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He searched for the spot in his middle that was always warm, even now when he was so cold. As long as he was alive it would be there. He found it, and with every breath he pushed it outward through his flesh. It was hard but he could feel it working, the warmth traveling out into his ribs like a fire, down his arms, down his legs, into his hands and feet. It was his left hand holding onto Jackie, and he glanced at her bare body with its white goosepimpled skin, and concentrated on sending the heat into her. He was shivering slightly now, but not from the cold.

"You're warm," Jackie exclaimed.

"Feel it," he said to her, and for a few moments she leaned into his grip. Then with an alarmed look she pulled free, and stepped down into the bath. Nirgal stood on the edge until his shivering stopped.

"Wow," Nadia said. "That's some kind of metabolic burn. I've heard of it, but I've never seen it."

"Do you know how you do it?" Sax asked him. He and Nadia and Michel and Rya were staring at him with a curious expression, which he did not want to meet.

Nirgal shook his head. He sat down on the concrete coping of the bath, suddenly exhausted. He stuck his feet in the water, which felt like liquid flame. Fish in water, sloshing free, out in the air, the fire within, white in the green, alchemy, soaring with eagles . . . thunderbolts from his fingertips!

3.

People looked at him. Even the Zygotes gave him sidelong looks, when he laughed or said something unusual, when they thought he wouldn't see. It was easiest just to ignore it, and pretend he didn't notice. But that was hard with the occasional visitors, who were more direct. "Oh, you're Nirgal," one short red-haired woman said. "I've heard you're bright." Nirgal, who was constantly crashing against the limits of his understanding, blushed and shook his head while the woman calmly surveyed him. She made her judgment and smiled and shook his hand. "I'm glad to meet you."

One day when they were five Jackie brought an old lectern to school with her, on a day when Maya was teaching. Ignoring Maya's glare, she showed it to the others. "This is my grandfather's AI. It has a lot of what he said in it. Kasei gave it to me." Kasei was leaving Zygote to move to one of the other sanctuaries. But not the one where Esther lived.

Jackie turned the lectern on. "Pauline, play back something my grandfather said."

"Well, here we are," said a man's voice.

"No, something different. Play back something he said about the hidden colony."

The man's voice said, "The hidden colony must still have contacts with surface settlements. There's too many things they can't manufacture

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

while hiding. Nuclear fuel rods for one, I should think. Those are controlled pretty well, and it could be that records would show where they've been disappearing."

The voice stopped. Maya told Jackie to put the lectern away, and she started another history lesson, the nineteenth century told in Russian sentences so short and harsh that her voice shook. And then more algebra. Maya was very insistent that they learn their math well. "You're getting a horrible education," she would say, shaking her head darkly. "But if you learn your math you can catch up later." And she would glare at them and demand the next answer.

Nirgal stared at her, remembering when she had been their bad witch. It would be strange to be her, so fierce sometimes and so cheerful others. With most of the people in Zygote, he could look at them and feel what it would be like to be them. He could see it in their faces, just like he could see the second color inside the first; it was that kind of gift, something like his hyper-acute sense of temperature. But he didn't understand Maya.

In the winter they made forays onto the surface, to the nearby crater where Nadia was building a shelter, and the dark ice-spangled dunes beyond. But when the fog hood lifted they had to stay under the dome, or at most go out to the window gallery. They weren't to be seen from above. No one was sure if the police were still watching from space or not, but it was best to be safe. Or so the issei said. Peter was often away, and his travels had led him to believe that the hunt for hidden colonies must be over. And that the hunt was hopeless in any case. "There are resistance settlements that aren't hiding at all. And there's so much noise now thermally and visually, and even over the radio," he said. "They could never check all the signals they're getting."

But Sax only said, "Algorithmic search programs are very effective," and Maya insisted on keeping out of sight, and hardening their electronics, and sending all their excess heat deep into the heart of the polar cap. Hiroko agreed with Maya on this, and so they all complied. "It's different for us," Maya said to Peter, looking haunted.

There was a mohole, Sax told them one morning at school, about two hundred kilometers to the northwest. The cloud they sometimes saw in that direction was its plume—big and still on some days, on others whipping off east in thin tatters. The next time Coyote came through they asked him at dinner if he had visited it, and he told them that he had, and that the great shaft of the mohole penetrated to very near the center of Mars, and that its bottom was nothing but bubbling molten fiery lava.

"That's not true," Maya said dismissively. "They only go down ten or fifteen kilometers. Their floors are hard rock."

"But hot rock," Hiroko said. "And twenty kilometers now, I hear."

"And so they do our work for us," Maya complained to Hiroko. "Don't you think we are parasites on the surface settlements? Your viriditas wouldn't get far without their engineering."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It will prove to be a symbiosis," Hiroko said calmly. She stared at Maya until Maya got up and walked away. Hiroko was the only one in Zygote who could stare Maya down.

Hiroko, Nirgal thought as he regarded his mother after this exchange, was very strange. She talked to him and to everyone else as an equal, and clearly to her everyone *was* an equal; but no one was special. He remembered very keenly when it had been different, when the two of them had been like two parts of a whole. But now she only took the same interest in him that she took in everyone else, her concern impersonal and distant. She would be the same no matter what happened to him, he thought. Nadia, or even Maya, cared for him more. And yet Hiroko was mother to them all. And Nirgal, like most of the rest of the regulars in Zygote, still went down to her little stand of bamboo when he was in need of something he couldn't find from ordinary people—some solace, or advice. . . .

But as often as not, when he did that he would find her and her little inner group "being silent," and if he wanted to stay he would have to stop talking. Sometimes this lasted for days at a time, until he stopped dropping by. Then again he might arrive during the areophany, and be swept up in the ecstatic chanting of the names of Mars, becoming an integral part of that tight little band, right in the heart of the world, with Hiroko herself at his side, her arm around him, squeezing hard.

That was love of a sort, and he cherished it; but it was not as it had been in the old days, when they had walked the beach together.

One morning he went into the school and came on Jackie and Dao in the coat room. They jumped as he entered, and by the time he had gotten his coat off and gone into the schoolroom he knew they had been kissing.

After school he circled the lake in the bluewhite glow of a summer afternoon, watching the wave machine rise and pulse down, like the clamping sensations in his chest. Pain curved through him like the swells moving over the water. He couldn't help it, even though it was ridiculous and he knew it. There was a lot of kissing going on among them these days in the bathhouse, as they splashed and tugged and pushed and tickled. The girls kissed each other and said it was "practice kissing" that didn't count, and sometimes they turned this practice on the boys; Nirgal had been kissed by Rachel many times, and also by Emily and Tiu and Nanedi, and once the latter two had held him and kissed his ears in an attempt to embarrass him in the public bath with an erection; and once Jackie had pulled them away from him and knocked him into the deep end, and bit his shoulder as they wrestled; and these were just the most memorable of the hundreds of slippery wet warm naked contacts which were making the baths such a high point of the day.

But outside the bathhouse, as if to try to contain such volatile forces, they had become extremely formal with each other, with the boys and girls bunched in gangs that played separately more often than not. So kissing in the coat room represented something new, and serious—and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the look Nirgal had seen on Jackie and Dao's faces was so superior, as if they knew something he didn't—which was true—and it was that which hurt, that exclusion, that knowledge. Especially since he wasn't that ignorant; he was sure they were lying together, making each other come. They were lovers, their look said it. His laughing beautiful Jackie was no longer his. And in fact never had been.

He slept poorly in the following nights. Jackie's room was in the shoot beside his, and Dao's was two in the opposite direction, and every creak of the hanging bridges sounded like footsteps; and sometimes her curved window glowed with flickering orange lamplight. Instead of remaining in his room to be tortured he began to stay up late every night in the common rooms, reading and eavesdropping on the adults.

So he was there when they started talking about Simon's illness. Simon was Peter's father, a quiet man who was usually away, on expeditions with Peter's mother Ann. Now it appeared that he had something they called resistant leukemia. Vlad and Ursula noticed Nirgal listening, and they tried to reassure him, but Nirgal could see that they weren't telling him everything. In fact they were regarding him with a strange speculative look. Later he climbed to his high room and got in bed and turned on his lectern, and looked up "Leukemia," and read the abstract at the start of the entry. A potentially fatal disease, now usually amenable to treatment. Potentially fatal disease—a shocking concept. He tossed uneasily that night, plagued by dreams through the gray bird-chirp dawn. Plants died, animals died, but not people. But they were animals.

The next night he stayed up with the adults again, feeling exhausted and strange. Vlad and Ursula sat down on the floor beside him. They told him that Simon would be helped by a bone marrow transplant, and that he and Nirgal shared a rare type of blood. Neither Ann nor Peter had it, nor any of Nirgal's brothers or sisters or halves. He had gotten it through his father, but even his father didn't have it, not exactly. Just him and Simon, in all the sanctuaries. There were only five thousand people in all of the sanctuaries together, and Simon and Nirgal's blood type was one in a million. Would he donate some of his bone marrow, they asked.

Hiroko was there in the commons, watching him. She rarely spent evenings in the village, and he didn't need to look at her to know what she was thinking. They were made to give, she had always said, and this would be the ultimate gift. An act of pure viriditas. "Of course," he said, happy at the opportunity.

The hospital was next to the bathhouse and the school. It was smaller than the school, and had five beds. They laid Simon on one, and Nirgal on another.

The old man smiled at him. He didn't look sick, only old. Just like all the rest of the ancients, in fact. He had seldom said much, and now he said only, "Thanks, Nirgal."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nirgal nodded. Then to his surprise Simon went on: "I appreciate you doing this. The extraction will hurt afterward for a week or two, right down in the bone. That's quite a thing to do for someone else."

"But not if they really need it," Nirgal said.

"Well, it's a gift that I'll try to repay, of course."

Vlad and Ursula anesthetized Nirgal's arm with a shot. "It isn't really necessary to do both operations now, but it's a good idea to have you two together for it. It will help the healing if you are friends."

So they became friends. After school Nirgal would go by the hospital, and Simon would step slowly out the door, and they would walk the path over the dunes to the beach. There they watched the waves ripple across the white surface and rise up and crumple on the strand. Simon was a lot less talkative than anyone Nirgal had ever spent time with; it was like being silent with Hiroko's group, only it never ended. At first it made him uncomfortable. But after a while he found it left time to really look at things: the gulls wheeling under the dome, the sandcrab bubbles in the sand, the circles surrounding each tuft of dune grass. Peter was back in Zygote a lot now, and many days he would come with them. Occasionally even Ann would interrupt her perpetual traveling, and visit Zygote and join them. Peter and Nirgal would race around playing tag, or hide and seek, while Ann and Simon strolled the beach arm in arm.

But Simon was still weak, and he got weaker. It was hard not to see this as some kind of moral failing; Nirgal had never been sick, and he found the concept disgusting. It could only happen to the old ones. And even they were supposed to have been saved by their aging treatment, which everyone got when they were old, and so never died. Only plants and animals died. But people were animals. But they had invented the treatment. At night, worrying about these discrepancies, Nirgal read his lectern's whole entry on leukemia, even though it was as long as a book. Cancer of the blood. White cells proliferated out of the bone marrow and flooded the system, attacking healthy systems. They were giving Simon chemicals and irradiation and pseudoviruses to kill the white blood cells, and trying to replace the sick marrow in him with new marrow from Nirgal. They had also given him the aging treatment three times now. Nirgal read about this too. It was a matter of genomic mismatch scanning, which found broken chromosomes and repaired them so that cell division error did not occur. But it was hard to penetrate bone with the array of introduced auto repair cells, and apparently in Simon's case little pockets of cancerous marrow had remained behind every time. Children had a better chance of recovery than adults, as the leukemia entry made clear. But with the aging treatments and the marrow transfusions he was sure to get well. It was just a matter of time and of giving. The treatments cured everything in the end.

"We need a bioreactor," Ursula said to Vlad. They were working on converting one of the ectogene tanks into one, packing it with spongy animal collagen and inoculating it with cells from Nirgal's marrow, hoping to generate an array of lymphocytes, macrophages, and granulocytes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But they didn't have the circulatory system working right, or perhaps it was the matrix, they weren't sure. Nirgal remained their living bioreactor.

Sax was teaching them soil chemistry during the mornings when he was teacher, and he even took them out of the school room occasionally to work in the soil labs, introducing biomass to the sand and then wheelbarrowing it to the greenhouses or the beach. It was fun work, but it tended to pass through Nirgal as if he were asleep. He would catch sight of Simon outside, stubbornly taking a walk, and he would forget whatever they were doing.

Despite the treatments Simon's steps were slow and stiff. He walked bowlegged, in fact, his legs swinging forward with very little bend to them. Once Nirgal caught up to him and stood beside him on the last dune before the beach. Sandpipers were charging up and down the wet strand, chased by white tapestries of foaming water. Simon pointed at the herd of black sheep, cropping grass between dunes. His arm rose like a bamboo crossbar. The sheep's frosted breath poured onto the grass.

Simon said something that Nirgal didn't catch; his lips were stiff now, and some words he was finding hard to pronounce. Perhaps it was this that was making him quieter than ever. Now he tried again, and then again, but no matter how hard he tried, Nirgal couldn't guess what he was saying. Finally Simon gave up trying and shrugged, and they were left looking at each other, mute and helpless.

When Nirgal played with the other kids, they both took him in and kept their distance, so that he moved in a kind of circle. Sax admonished him mildly for his absentmindedness in class. "Concentrate on the moment," he would say, forcing Nirgal to recite the loops of the nitrogen cycle, or to shove his hands deep into the wet black soil they were working on, instructing him to knead it, to break up the long strings of diatom blooms, and the fungi and lichen and algae and all the invisible microbacteria they had grown, to distribute them through the rusty clods of grit. "Get it distributed as regularly as possible. Pay attention, that's it. Nothing but this. Thisness is a very important quality. Look at the structures on the microscope screen. That clear one like a rice grain is a chemolithotroph, *Thiobacillus denitrificans*. And there's a chunk of sulphides. Now what will result when the former eats the latter?"

"It oxidizes the sulphur."

"And?"

"And denitrifies."

"Which is?"

"Nitrates into nitrogen. From the ground into the air."

"Very good. A very useful microbe, that."

So Sax forced him to pay attention to the moment, but the price was high. He found himself exhausted at midday when school was over, it was hard to do things in the afternoon. Then they asked him to give more marrow for Simon, who lay in the hospital mute and embarrassed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his eyes apologizing to Nirgal, who steeled himself to smile, to put his fingers around Simon's bamboo forearm. "It's all right," he said cheerily, and lay down. Although surely Simon was doing something wrong, was weak or lazy or somehow wanted to be sick. There was no other way to explain it. They stuck the needle in Nirgal's arm and it went numb. He lay back, part of the fabric of the hospital, trying to go as numb as he could. Part of him could feel the big marrow needle, pushing against his upper arm bone. No pain, no feeling in his flesh at all, just a pressure on the bone. Then it let up, and he knew the needle had penetrated to the soft inside of his bone.

This time the process did not help at all. Simon was useless, he stayed in the hospital continually. Nirgal visited him there from time to time, and they played a weather game on Simon's screen, tapping buttons for dice rolls, and exclaiming when the roll of one or twelve cast them abruptly onto another quadrant of Mars, one with a whole new climate. Simon's laugh, never more than a chuckle, had diminished now to just a little smile.

Nirgal's arm hurt, and he slept poorly, tossing through the nights and waking hot and sweaty, and frightened for no reason. Then one night Hiroko woke him from the depths of slumber, and led him down the winding staircase and over to the hospital. He leaned groggily against her, unable to wake fully. She was as impassive as ever, but had her arm around his shoulders, holding him with surprising strength. When they passed Ann sitting in the hospital's outer room something in the slope of Ann's shoulders caused Nirgal to wonder why Hiroko was here in the village at night, and he struggled to wake fully, touched by dread.

The hospital's bedroom was overlit, sharp-edged, pulsing as if glories were trying to burst out of every thing. Simon lay with his head on a white pillow. His skin was pale and waxy. He looked a thousand years old.

He turned his head and saw Nirgal. His dark eyes searched Nirgal's face with a hungry look, as if he were trying to find a way into Nirgal—a way to jump across into him. Nirgal shivered and held the dark intense gaze, thinking okay, come into me. Do it if you want. Do it.

But there was no way across. They both saw that. They both relaxed. A little smile passed over Simon's face, and he reached over with an effort and held Nirgal's hand. Now his eyes darted back and forth, searching Nirgal's face with a completely different expression, as if he were trying to find words that would help Nirgal in the years to come, that would pass across whatever it was that Simon had learned.

But that too was impossible. Again they both saw it. Simon would have to give Nirgal to his fate, whatever it was. There was no way to help. "Be good," he whispered finally, and Hiroko led Nirgal out of the room. She took him through the dark back up to his room, and he fell into a deep sleep. Simon died sometime during the night.

It was the first funeral in Zygote, and the first for all the children. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the adults knew what to do. They met in one of the greenhouses, among the work benches, and they sat in a circle around the long box holding Simon's body. They passed around a flask of rice liquor, and everyone filled their neighbor's cup. They drank the fiery stuff down, and the old ones walked around the box holding hands, and then they sat in a knot around Ann and Peter. Maya and Nadia sat by Ann with their arms around her shoulders. Ann appeared stunned, Peter disconsolate. Jurgen and Maya told stories about Simon's legendary taciturnity. "One time," Maya said, "we were in a rover and an oxygen canister blew out and knocked a hole in the cabin roof, and we were all running around screaming and Simon had been outside and he picked up a rock just the right size and jumped up and dropped it in the hole, and plugged it. And afterward we were all talking like crazy people, and working to make a real plug, and suddenly we realized Simon still hadn't *said* anything, and we all stopped working and looked at him, and he said, 'That was close.' "

They laughed. Vlad said, "Or remember the time we gave our mock awards in Underhill, and Simon got one for best video, and he went up to accept the award and said 'Thank you,' and started to return to his seat, and then he stopped and went back up to the podium, as if something had occurred to him to say, you know, which got our attention naturally, and he cleared his throat and said 'Thank you *very much*.' "

Ann almost laughed at that, and stood, and led them out into the frigid air. The old ones carried the box down to the beach, and everyone else followed. It was snowing through mist when they took his body out and buried it deep in the sand, just above the wave's high water mark. They slid the board out of the top of the long box and burned Simon's name onto it with Nadia's soldering iron, and stuck the board in the first dune. Now Simon would be part of the carbon cycle, food for bacteria and crabs and then sandpipers and gulls, thus slowly melting into the biomass under the dome. This was how one was buried. And sure, part of it was comforting; to spread out into one's world, to disperse into it. But to end as a self, to go away. . . .

And here they all were walking under the dim dome, having buried Simon in suffocating sand, trying to behave as if reality had not suddenly ripped apart and snatched one of them away. Nirgal couldn't believe it. They straggled back into the village blowing on their hands, talking in subdued voices. Nirgal drew near Vlad and Ursula, longing for reassurance of some kind. Ursula was sad, and Vlad was trying to cheer her up. "He lived more than a hundred years, we can't go around thinking his death was premature, or it makes a mockery of all those poor people who died at fifty, or twenty, or one."

"But it was still premature," Ursula said stubbornly. "With the treatments, who knows? He might have lived a thousand years."

"I'm not so sure. It looks to me like the treatments are not in fact penetrating to every part of our bodies. And with all the radiation we've taken on, we may have more troubles than we thought at first."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Maybe. But if we had been at Acheron, with the whole crew, and a bioreactor, and all our facilities, I bet we would have saved him. And then you can't say how many more years he might have had. I call that premature."

She went off to be by herself.

That night Nirgal could not sleep at all. He kept feeling the transfusions, seeing every moment of them and imagining that there had been some kind of backwash in the system, so that he had been infected with the disease. Or contaminated by touch alone, why not? Or just by that last look in Simon's eye! So that he had caught the disease they could not stop, and would die. Stiffen up, go mute, stop and go away. That was death. His heart pounded and a sweat broke through his skin, and he cried with the fear of it. There was no avoiding it; and it was horrible. Horrible no matter when it happened. Horrible that the cycle itself should work the way it did—that it should go round and round and round, while they lived only once and then died forever. Why live at all? It was too strange, too horrible. And so he shivered through the long night, his mind gone cyclonic with the fear of death.

4.

After that he found it extremely hard to concentrate. He felt like he was always at a remove from things, as if he had slipped into the white world and could not quite touch the green one.

Hiroko noticed this problem, and suggested he go with Coyote on one of his trips out. Nirgal was shocked by the idea, having never been more than a walk away from Zygote. But Hiroko insisted. He was seven years old, she said, and about to become a man. Time he saw a bit of the surface world.

A few weeks later Coyote dropped by, and when he left again Nirgal was with him, seated in the copilot's seat of his boulder car, and goggling out the low windshield at the purple arch of evening sky. Coyote turned the car around to give him a view of the great glowing pink wall of the polar cap, which arced across the horizon like an enormous rising moon.

"It's hard to believe something that big could ever melt," Nirgal said.

"It will take a while."

They drove north at a sedate pace; the boulder car was stealthed, covered by a hollowed-out rock shell that was thermally regulated to stay the same temperature as its surroundings, and it had a no-track device on the front axle to read the terrain and pass the information to the back axle, where scraper-shapers plowed their wheel tracks, returning the sand and rock to whatever shape they had had before their passing. So they could not race along.

For a long time they traveled in silence, though Coyote's silence was not the same as Simon's had been. He hummed, he muttered, he talked in a low sing-song voice to his AI, in a language that sounded like English

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but was not comprehensible. Nirgal tried to concentrate on the limited view out the window, feeling awkward and shy. The region around the south polar cap was a series of broad flat terraces, and they descended from one to the next by routes that seemed programmed into the car, down terrace after terrace until it seemed the polar cap must be sitting on a kind of huge pedestal. Nirgal stared into the dark, impressed by the size of the things, but happy too that it was not absolutely overwhelming, as his first walk out had been. That had happened a long time ago, but he could still remember the staggering astonishment of it perfectly.

This was not like that. "It doesn't seem as big as I thought it would," he said. "I guess it's the curvature of the land, it being such a small planet and all." As the lectern said. "The horizon isn't any farther away than one side of Zygote to the other!"

"Uh huh," Coyote said, giving him a look. "You better not let Big Man hear you say such a thing, he kick your ass for that." Then— "Who's your father, boy?"

"I don't know. Hiroko is my mother."

Coyote snorted. "Hiroko takes the matriarchy too far, if you ask me."

"Have you told her that?"

"You bet I have, but Hiroko only listens to me when I say things she wants to hear." He cackled. "Same as with everyone, right?"

Nirgal nodded, a grin splitting his attempt to be impassive.

"You want to find out who your father is?"

"Sure." Actually he was not sure. The concept of father meant little to him; and he was afraid it would turn out to be Simon. Peter was like an elder brother to him, after all.

"They've got the equipment in Vishniac. We can try there if you want." He shook his head. "Hiroko is so strange. When I met her you would never have guessed it would come to this. Of course we were young then—almost as young as you are, though you will find that hard to credit."

Which was true.

"When I met her she was just a young eco-engineering student, smart as a whip and sexy as a cat. None of this mother goddess of the world stuff. But by and by she started to read books that were not her technical manuals, and it went on and on and by the time she got to Mars she was crazy. Before, actually. Which is lucky for me as that is why I'm here. But Hiroko, oh my. She was convinced that all human history had gone wrong at the start. At the dawn of civilization, she would say to me very seriously, there was Crete and Sumeria, and Crete had a peaceful trading culture, run by women and filled with art and beauty—a utopia in fact, where the men were acrobats who jumped bulls all day, and women all night, and got the women pregnant and worshipped them, and everyone was happy. It sounds good except for the bulls. While Sumeria on the other hand was ruled by men, who invented war and conquered everything in sight and started all the slave empires that have come since. And no one knew, Hiroko said, what might have happened if these two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

civilizations had had a chance to contest the rule of the world, because a volcano blew Crete to kingdom come, and the world passed into Sumeria's hands and has never left it to this day. If only that volcano had been in Sumeria, she used to tell me, everything would be different. And maybe it's true. Because history could hardly get any blacker than it has been."

Nirgal was surprised at this characterization. "But now," he ventured, "we're starting again."

"That's right, boy! We are the primitives of an unknown civilization. Living in our own little techno-Minoan matriarchy. Ha! I like it fine, myself. Seems to me the power that our women have taken on was never that interesting to begin with. Power is one half of the yoke, don't you remember that from the stuff I made you kids read? Master and slave wear the yoke together. Anarchy is the only true freedom. So, well, whatever women do, it seems to go against them. If they're men's cows, then they work till they drop. But if they're our queens and goddesses then they only work the harder, because they still have to do the cow work and then the paperwork too! No way. Just be thankful you're a man, and as free as the sky."

It was a peculiar way to think of things, Nirgal thought. But clearly it was one way to deal with the fact of Jackie's beauty, of her immense power over his mind. And so Nirgal ducked low in his seat and stared out the window at the white stars in the black, thinking Free as the sky! Free as the sky!

It was Ls 4, 2 March the 22nd, M-year 32, and the southern days were getting shorter. Coyote drove their car hard every night, over intricate and invisible paths, through terrain that got more and more rugged the farther they got from the polar cap. They stopped to rest during the daylight, and drove the rest of the time. Nirgal tried to stay awake, but inevitably slept through part of every drive, and through part of every day's stop as well, until he became thoroughly confused in both time and space.

But when he was awake he was almost always looking out the window, at the ever-changing surface of Mars. He couldn't get enough of it. In the layered terrain there was an infinite array of patterns, the stratified stacks of sand fluted by the wind until each winglike dune was cut like a bird's wing. When the layered terrain finally ran out onto exposed bedrock, the laminate dunes became individual sand islands, scattered over a jumbled plain of outcroppings and clusters of rock. It was red rock everywhere he looked, rock sized from gravel to immense boulders that sat like buildings on the land. The sand islands were tucked into every dip and hollow in this rockscape, and they also clustered around the feet of big knots of boulders, and on the lee sides of low scarps, and in the interiors of craters.

And there were craters everywhere. They first appeared as two bumps rolling over the skysill, which quickly proved to be the connected outer points of a low ridge. They passed scores of these flat-topped hills, some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

steep and sharp, others low and nearly buried, still others with their rims broken by smaller later impacts, so that one could see right in to the sand drifts filling them.

One night just before dawn Coyote stopped the car.

"Something wrong?"

"No. We've reached Ray's Lookout, and I want you to see it. Sun'll be up in an hour."

So they sat in the pilots' seats and watched the dawn.

"How old are you, boy?"

"Seven."

"What's that, thirteen Earth years? Fourteen?"

"I guess."

"Wow. You're already taller than me."

"Uh huh." Nirgal refrained from pointing out that this did not imply any great height. "How old are you?"

"One hundred and nine. Ah ha ha! You best shut your eyes or they'll pop out of your head. Don't you look at me like that. I was old the day I was born and I'll be young the day I die."

They drowsed as the sky on the eastern skyline turned a deep purply blue. Coyote hummed a little tune to himself, sounding like he had eaten a tab of omegendorph, as he often did in the evenings at Zygote. Gradually it became clear that the skysill was very far away, and also very high; Nirgal had never seen land so far away, and it seemed to curve around them as well, a black curving wall that lay an immense distance off, over a black rocky plain. "Hey Coyote!" he exclaimed. "What *is* this?"

"Ha!" Coyote said, sounding deeply satisfied.

The sky lightened and the sun suddenly cracked the upper edge of the distant wall, blasting Nirgal's vision for a while. But as the sun rose the shadows on the huge semi-circular cliff gave way in wedges of light that revealed sharp ragged embayments, scalloping the larger curve of the wall, which was so big that Nirgal simply gasped, his nose pressed right against the windshield—it was almost frightening it was so big! "Coyote, what *is* it?"

Coyote let out one of his alarming laughs, the animal cackle filling the car. "So you see it isn't such a small world after all, eh, boy? This is the floor of Promethei Basin. It's an impact basin, one of the biggest on Mars, almost as big as Argyre, but it hit down here near the South Pole, so about half of its rim has since been buried under the polar cap and the layered terrain. The other half is this curved escarpment here." He waved a hand expansively. "Kind of like a super-big caldera, but only half there, so you can drive right into it. This little rise is the best place I know for seeing it." He called up a map of the region, and pointed. "We're on the apron of this little crater here, Vt, and looking northwest. The cliff is Promethei Rupes, there. It's about a kilometer high. Of course the Echus cliff is three kilometers high, and the Olympus Mons cliff is *six* kilometers high, do you hear that Mister Small Planet? But this baby will have to do for this morning."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sun rose higher, illuminating the great curve of the cliff from above. It was deeply cut by ravines and smaller craters. "Prometheus Sanctuary is in the side of that big indentation there," Coyote said, and pointed to the left side of the curve. "Crater Wj."

As they waited through the long day Nirgal looked at the gigantic cliff almost continuously, and each time it looked different, as the shadows shortened and shifted, revealing new features and obscuring others. It would have taken years of looking to see it all, and he found he could not overcome the feeling that the wall was unnaturally, or even impossibly, huge. Coyote was right—the tight horizons had fooled him—he had not imagined the world could *be* so big.

That night they drove into Crater Wj, one of the biggest embayments in the giant wall. And then they reached the curving cliff of Promethei Rupes. The cliff towered over them like the vertical side of the universe itself; the polar cap was nothing compared to this rock mass. Which meant that the Olympus Mons cliff that Coyote had mentioned would have to be . . . he didn't know how to think it.

Down at the foot of the cliff, at a spot where unbroken rock dropped almost vertically into flat sand, there was a recessed lock door. Inside was the sanctuary called Prometheus, a collection of wide chambers stacked like the rooms of a bamboo house, with incurving filtered windows overlooking Crater Wj and the larger basin beyond. The inhabitants of the sanctuary spoke French, and so did Coyote when talking to them. They were not as old as Coyote or the other issei, but they were pretty old, and of Terran height, which meant they mostly looked up to Nirgal, while speaking very hospitably to him, in fluent but accented English. "So you are Nirgal! *Enchanté!* We have heard of you, we are happy to meet you!"

A group of them showed him around while Coyote did other things. Their sanctuary was very unlike Zygote; it was, to put it plainly, nothing but rooms. There were several large ones stacked by the wall, with smaller ones at the back of these. Three of the window rooms were greenhouses, and all the rooms throughout the refuge were kept very warm, and filled with plants and wall hangings and statuary and fountains; to Nirgal it seemed confining, and much too hot, and utterly fascinating.

But they only stayed a day, and then they drove Coyote's car into a big elevator, and sat in it for an hour. When Coyote drove out the opposite door they were on top of the rugged plateau that lay behind Promethei Rupes. And here Nirgal was once again shocked. When they had been down at Ray's Lookout, the great cliff had formed a limit to what they could see, and he had been able to comprehend it. But on top of the cliff, looking back down, the distances were so great that Nirgal could not grasp what he saw. It was nothing but a blurry vertiginous mass of blobs and patches of color—white, purple, brown, tan, rust, white—it made him queasy. "Storm coming in," Coyote said, and Nirgal saw that the colors above them were a fleet of tall solid clouds, sailing through a violet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sky with the sun well to the west—the clouds whitish above and infinitely lobed, but dark gray on their bottoms. These cloud bottoms were closer to their heads than the ground of the basin, and they were all on a level, as if rolling over a transparent floor. The world below was nothing so even, mottled tan and chocolate—ah—those were the shadows of the clouds, visibly moving. And that white crescent out in the middle of things was the polar cap! They could see all the way home! Recognizing the ice gave him the final bit of perspective needed to make sense of things, and the blobs of color stabilized into a bumpy uneven ringed landscape, mottled by moving cloud shadows.

This dizzying act of cognition had only taken Nirgal a few seconds, but when he finished he saw that Coyote was watching him with a big grin.

"Just how far can we see, Coyote? How many kilometers?"

Coyote only cackled. "Ask Big Man, boy. Or figure it out for yourself! What, three hundred k? Something like that. A hop and a jump for the big one. A thousand empires for the little ones."

"I want to run it."

"I'm sure you do. Oh, look, look! There—from the clouds over the ice cap. Lightning, see it? Those little flickers are lightning."

And there they were, bright threads of light, appearing and disappearing soundlessly, one or two every few seconds, connecting black clouds with white ground. He was seeing lightning at last, with his own eyes. The white world sparkling into the green, jolting it. "There's nothing like a big storm," Coyote was saying. "Nothing like it. Oh to be out in the wind! We made that storm, boy. Although I think I could make an even bigger one."

But a bigger one was beyond Nirgal's ability to imagine; what lay below them was cosmically vast—electric, shot with color, windy with spaciousness. He was actually a bit relieved when Coyote turned their car around and drove off, and the blurry view disappeared, the edge of the cliff becoming a new skysill behind them.

"Just what is lightning again?"

"Well, lightning . . . shit. I must confess that lightning is one of the phenomena in this world that I cannot hold the explanation for in my head. People have told me, but it always slips away. Electricity, of course, something about electrons or ions, positive and negative, charges building up in thunderheads, discharging to the ground, or both up and down at once, I seem to recall. Who knows. Ka boom! That's lightning, eh?"

The white world and the green, rubbing together, snapping with the friction. Of course.

There were several sanctuaries on the plateau north of Promethei Rupes, some hidden in escarpment walls and crater rims, like Nadia's tunneling project outside Zygote; but other simply sitting in craters under clear tent domes, there for any sky police to see. The first time Coyote drove up to the rim of one of these and they looked down through the clear tent dome onto a village under the stars, Nirgal had been once

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again amazed, though it was amazement of a lesser order than that engendered by the landscape. Buildings like the school, and the bathhouse and the kitchen, trees, greenhouses—it was all basically familiar—but how could they get away with it, out in the open like this? It was disconcerting.

And so full of people, of strangers. Nirgal had known in theory that there were a lot of people in the southern sanctuaries, five thousand as they said, all defeated rebels of the 2061 war—but it was something else again to meet so many of them so fast, and see that it was really true. And staying in the unhidden settlements made him extremely nervous. "How can they do it?" he asked Coyote. "Why aren't they arrested and taken away?"

"You got me, boy. It's possible they could be. But they haven't been yet, and so they don't think it's worth the trouble to hide. You know it takes a tremendous effort to hide—you got to do all that thermal disposal engineering, and electronic hardening, and you got to keep out of sight all the time—it's a pain in the ass. And some people down here just don't want to do it. They call themselves the demimonde. They have plans for if they're ever investigated or invaded—most of them have escape tunnels like ours, and some even have some weapons stashed away. But they figure that if they're out on the surface, there's no reason to be checked out in the first place. The folks in Christianopolis just told the UN straight out that they came down here to get out of the net. But . . . I agree with Hiroko on this one. That some of us have to be a little more careful than that. The UN is out to get the First Hundred, if you ask me. And its family too, unfortunately for you kids. Anyway, now the resistance includes the underground and the demimonde, and having the open towns is a big help to the hidden sanctuaries, so I'm glad they're here. At this point we depend on them."

Coyote was welcomed effusively in this town as he was everywhere, whether the settlement was hidden or exposed. He settled into a corner of a big garage on the crater rim, and conducted a continuous brisk exchange of goods, including seed stocks, software, light bulbs, spare parts, and small machines. These he gave out after long consultations with their hosts, in bargaining sessions that Nirgal couldn't understand. And then, after a brief tour of the crater floor, where the village looked surprisingly like Zygote under a brilliant purple dome, they were off again.

On the drives between sanctuaries Coyote did not explain his bargaining sessions very effectively. "I'm saving these people from their own ridiculous notion of economics, that's what I'm doing! A gift economy is all very well, but it isn't organized enough for our situation. There are critical items that everyone has to have, so people *have* to give, which is a contradiction, right? So I am trying to work out a rational system. Actually Vlad and Marina are working it out, and I am trying to implement it, which means I get all the grief."

"And this system. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, it's a sort of two-track thing, where they can still give all they want, but the necessities are given values and distributed properly. And good God you wouldn't believe some of the arguments I get in. People can be such fools. I try to make sure it all adds up to a stable ecology, like one of Hiroko's systems, with every sanctuary filling its niche and providing its specialty, and what do I get for it? Abuse, that's what I get! *Radical* abuse. I try to stop potlatching and they call me a robber baron, I try to stop hoarding and they call me a fascist. The fools! What are they going to do, when none of them are self-sufficient, and half of them are crazy paranoid?" He sighed theatrically. "So, anyway. We're making progress. Christianopolis makes light bulbs, and Mauss Hyde grows new kinds of plants, as you saw, and Bogdanov Vishniac makes everything big and difficult, like reactor rods and stealth vehicles and most of the big robots, and your Zygote makes scientific instrumentation, and so on. And I spread them around."

"Are you the only one doing that?"

"Almost. They're mostly self-sufficient, actually, except for these few criticalities. They all got programs and seeds, that's the basic necessities. And besides, it's important that not too many people know where all the hidden sanctuaries are."

Nirgal digested the implications of this as they drove through the night. Coyote went on about the hydrogen peroxide standard and the nitrogen standard, a new system of Vlad and Marina's, and Nirgal did his best to follow but found it hard going, either because the concepts were difficult or else because Coyote spent most of his explanations fulminating over the difficulties he encountered in certain sanctuaries. Nirgal decided to ask Sax or Nadia about it when he got home, and stopped listening.

The land they were crossing now was dominated by crater rings, the newer ones overlapping and even burying older ones. "This is called saturation cratering. Very ancient ground." A lot of the craters had no raised rims at all, but were simply shallow flat-bottomed round holes in the ground.

"What happened to the rims?"

"Worn away."

"By what?"

"Ann says ice, and wind. She says as much as a kilometer was stripped off the southern highlands over time."

"That would take away everything!"

"But then more came back. This is old land."

In between craters the land was covered with loose rock, and it was unbelievably uneven; there were dips, rises, hollows, knolls, trenches, grabens, uplifts, hills and dales; never even a moment's flatness, except on crater rims and occasional low ridges, both of which Coyote used as roads when he could. But the track he followed over this lumpy landscape was still tortuous, and Nirgal could not believe it was memorized. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said as much, and Coyote laughed. "What do you mean memorized? We're lost!"

But not really, or not for long. A mohole plume appeared over the horizon, and Coyote drove for it.

"Knew it all along," he muttered. "This is Vishniac mohole. It's a vertical shaft a kilometer across, dug straight down into the bedrock. There were four moholes started around the seventy-five degree latitude line, and two of them are no longer occupied, even by robots. Vishniac is one of the two, and it's been taken over by a bunch of Bogdanovists who live down inside it." He laughed. "It's a wonderful idea, because they can dig into the side wall along the road to the bottom, and down there they can put out as much heat as they want and no one can tell that it's not just more mohole outgassing. So they can build anything they like, even process uranium for reactor fuel rods. It's an entire little industrial city now. Also one of my favorite places, very big on partying."

He drove them into one of the many small trenches cutting the land, then braked and tapped at his screen, and a big rock swung out from the side of the trench, revealing a black tunnel. Coyote drove into the tunnel and the rock door closed behind them. Nirgal had thought he was beyond surprise at this point, but he watched round-eyed as they drove down the tunnel, its rough rock walls just outside the edges of the boulder car. It seemed to go on forever. "They've dug a number of approach tunnels, so that the mohole itself can look completely unvisited. We have about twenty kilometers to go."

Eventually Coyote turned off the headlights. Their car rolled out into the dim eggplant black of night; they were on a steep road, apparently spiraling down the wall of the mohole. Their instrument panel lights were like tiny lanterns, and looking through his reflected image Nirgal could see that the road was four or five times as wide as the car. The full extent of the mohole itself was impossible to see, but by the curve of the road he could tell that it was a big hole, perhaps a kilometer across. "Are you sure we're turning at the right speed?" he said anxiously.

"I am trusting the automatic pilot," Coyote said, irritated. "It's bad luck to discuss it."

The car rolled down the road. After more than an hour's descent there was a beep from the instrument panel, and the car turned into the curving wall of rock to their left. And there was a garage tube, clanking against their outer lock door.

Inside the garage a group of twenty or so people greeted them, and took them past a line of tall rooms to a cavernlike chamber. The rooms that the Bogdanovists had excavated into the side of the mohole were big, much bigger than those at Prometheus. The back rooms were ten meters high as a rule, and in some case two hundred meters deep; and the main cavern rivaled Zygote itself, with big windows facing out onto the hole. Looking sideways through the window Nirgal saw that the glass seen from the outside looked like the rock face; the filtered coatings must have been clever indeed, because as the morning arrived, its light

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poured in very brightly. The windows' view was limited to the far wall of the mohole, and a gibbous patch of sky above—but they gave the rooms a wonderful sense of spaciousness and light, a feeling of being under the sky that Zygote could not match.

Through that first day Nirgal was taken in hand by a small dark-skinned man named Hilali, who led him through rooms and interrupted people at their work to introduce him. People were friendly—"You must be one of Hiroko's kids, eh? Oh, you're Nirgal! Very nice to meet you! Hey John, Coyote's here, party tonight!"—and they showed him what they were doing, leading him back into smaller rooms behind the ones fronting the mohole, where there were farms under bright light, and manufactories that seemed to extend back into the rock forever; and all of it very warm, as in a bathhouse, so that Nirgal was constantly sweating. "Where did you put all the excavated rock?" he asked Hilali, for one of the convenient things about cutting a dome under the polar cap, Hiroko had said, was that the excavated dry ice had simply been gassed off.

"It's lining the road near the bottom of the mohole," Hilali told him, pleased at the question. He seemed pleased with all Nirgal's questions, as did everyone else; people in Vishniac seemed happy in general, a rowdy crowd who always partied to celebrate Coyote's arrival—one excuse among many, Nirgal gathered.

Hilali took a call on the wrist from Coyote, and led Nirgal into a lab where they took a bit of skin from his finger. Then they made their way slowly back to the big cavern, and joined the crowd lining up by kitchen windows at the back.

After eating a big spicy meal of beans and potatoes, they began to party in the cavern room. A huge undisciplined steel drum band with a fluctuating membership played rhythmic staccato melodies, and people danced to them for hours, pausing from time to time to drink an atrocious liquor called kavajava, or join a variety of games on one side of the room. After trying the kavajava, and swallowing a tab of an omegendorph given to him by Coyote, Nirgal ran in place while playing a bass drum with the band, then sat on top of a small grassy mound in the center of the chamber, feeling too drunk to stand. Coyote had been drinking steadily but had no such problem; he was dancing wildly, hopping high off his toes and laughing. "You'll never know the joy of your own g, boy!" he shouted at Nirgal. "You'll never know!"

People came by and introduced themselves, sometimes asking Nirgal to exhibit his warming touch—a group of girls his age put his hands to their cheeks, which they had chilled with their drinks, and when he warmed them up they laughed round-eyed, and invited him to warm other parts of them; he got up and danced with them instead, feeling loose and dizzy, running in little circles to discharge some of the energy in him. When he returned to the knoll, buzzing, Coyote came weaving over and sat heavily beside him. "*So* fine to dance in this g, I never get over it." He regarded Nirgal with a cross-eyed glare, his gray dreadlocks falling all over his head, and Nirgal noticed again how his face seemed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to have cracked somehow, perhaps been broken at the jaw, so that one side was broader than the other. Something like that. Nirgal gulped at the sight.

Coyote took him by the shoulder and shook him hard. "It seems that I am your father, boy!" he exclaimed.

"You're kidding!" An electric flush ran down Nirgal's spine and out his face as the two of them stared at each other, and he marveled at how the white world could shock the green one so thoroughly, like lightning pulsing through flesh. They clutched each other.

"I am not kidding!" Coyote said.

They stared at each other. "No wonder you're so smart," Coyote said, and laughed hilariously. "Ah ha ha ha! Ka wow! I hope it's okay with you!"

"Sure," Nirgal said, grinning but uncomfortable. He didn't know Coyote well, and the concept of father was even vaguer to him than that of mother, so he wasn't really sure what he felt. Genetic inheritance, sure, but what was that? They all got their genes somewhere, and the genes of ectogenes were transgenic anyway, or so they said.

But Coyote, though he cursed Hiroko in a hundred different ways, seemed to be pleased. "That vixen, that tyrant! Martiarchy my ass—she's crazy! It amazes me the things she does! Although this has a certain justice to it. Yes it does, because Hiroko and I were an item back in the dawn of time, when we were young in England. That's the reason I'm here on Mars at all. A stowaway in her closet, my whole fucking life long." He laughed and clapped Nirgal on the shoulder again. "Well, boy, you will know better how you like the idea later on."

He went back out to dance, leaving Nirgal to think it over. Watching Coyote's gyrations, Nirgal could only shake his head; he didn't know what to think, and at the moment thinking anything at all was remarkably difficult. Better to dance, or seek out the baths.

But they had no public baths. He ran around in circles on the dance floor, making his running a kind of dance, and later he returned to the same mound, and a group of the locals gathered around him and Coyote. "Like being the father of the Dalai Lama, eh? Don't you get a name for that?"

"To hell with you, man! Like I was saying, Ann says they stopped digging these seventy-five degree moholes because the lithosphere is thinner down here." Coyote nodded portentously. "I want to go to one of the decommissioned moholes and start up its robots again, and see if they dig down far enough to start a volcano."

Everyone laughed. But one woman shook her head. "If you do that they'll come down here to check it out. If you're going to do it, you should go north and hit one of the sixty degree moholes. They're decommisioned too."

"But the lithosphere up there is thicker, Ann says."

"Sure, but the moholes are deeper too."

"Hmm," Coyote said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And the conversation moved on to more serious matters, mostly the inevitable topics of shortages, and developments in the north. But at the end of that week, when they left Vishniac, by way of a different and longer tunnel, they headed north, and all Coyote's previous plans had been thrown out the window. "That's the story of my life, boy."

On the fifth night of driving over the jumbled highlands of the south, Coyote slowed the rover, and circled the edge of a big old crater, subdued almost to the level of the surrounding plain. From a defile in the ancient rim one could see that the sandy crater floor was marred by a giant round black hole. This, apparently, was what a mohole looked like from the surface. A plume of thin frost stood in the air a few hundred meters over the hole, appearing from nothing like a magician's trick. The edge of the mohole was beveled so that there was a band of concrete funneling down at about a 45 degree angle; it was hard to say how big this coping band was, because the mohole made it seem like no more than a strip. There was a high wire fence at its outer edge. "Hmm," Coyote said, staring out the windshield. He backed up in the defile and parked, then slipped into a walker. "Back soon," he said, and hopped in the lock.

It was a long, anxious night for Nirgal. He barely slept, and was in an intensifying agony of worry the next morning, when he saw Coyote appear outside the boulder car lock, just before seven A.M. when the sun was about to rise. He was ready to complain about the length of this disappearance, but when Coyote got inside and got his helmet off it was obvious he was in a foul temper. While they sat out the day he tapped away at his AI in an absorbed conference, cursing vilely, oblivious to his hungry young charge. Nirgal went ahead and heated meals for them both, and then napped uneasily, and woke when the rover jerked forward. "I'm going to try going in through the gate," Coyote said. "That's quite the security they have on that hole. One more night should see it either way." He circled the crater and parked on the far rim, and at dusk once again left on foot.

Again he was gone all night, and again Nirgal found it very difficult to sleep. He wondered what he was supposed to do if Coyote didn't return.

And indeed he was not back by dawn. The day that followed was the longest of Nirgal's life without a question, and at the end of it he had no idea what he was going to do. Try to rescue Coyote; try to drive back to Zygote, or Vishniac; go down to the mohole, and give himself up to whatever mysterious security system had eaten up Coyote; all seemed impossible.

But an hour after sunset Coyote tapped the car with his *tik-tik-tik*, and then he was inside, his face a furious mask. He drank a liter of water and then most of another, and blew out his lips in disgust. "Let us get the fuck out of here," he said.

After a couple hours of silent driving Nirgal thought to change the subject, or at least enlarge it, and he said, "Coyote, how long do you think we will have to stay hidden?"

"Don't call me Coyote! I'm not Coyote. Coyote is out there in the back

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the hills, breathing the air already and doing what he wants, the bastard. Me my name is Desmond, you call me *Desmond,* understand?"

"Okay," Nirgal said, afraid.

"As for how long we will have to stay hiding, I think it will be forever."

They drove back south to Rayleigh mohole, where Coyote (he didn't seem to be a Desmond) had thought to go in the first place. This mohole was truly abandoned, an unlit hole in the highlands, its thermal plume standing over it like the ghost of a monument. They could drive right into the empty sand-covered parking lot and garage at its rim, between a small fleet of robot vehicles shrouded by tarpaulins and sand drifts. "This is more like it," Coyote muttered. "Here, we've got to take a look down inside it. Come on, get into your walker."

It was strange to be out in the wind, standing on the rim of such an enormous gap in things. They looked over a chest-high wall and saw the beveled concrete band that rimmed the hole, dropping at an angle for about two hundred meters. In order to see down the shaft proper, they had to walk about a kilometer down a curving road cut into the concrete band. There they could stop at last, and look over the road's edge, down into blackness. Coyote stood right on the edge, which made Nirgal nervous. He got on his hands and knees to look over. No sign of a bottom; they might as well have been looking into the center of the planet. "Twenty kilometers," Coyote said over the intercom. He held a hand out over the edge, and Nirgal did too. He could feel the updraft. "Okay, let's see if we can get the robots going." And they hiked back up the road.

Coyote had spent many of their daytime hours studying old programs on his AI, and now with the hydrogen peroxide from their trailer pumped into two of the robot behemoths in the parking lot, he plugged into their control panels and went at it. When he was done he was satisfied they would perform as required at the bottom of the mohole, and they watched the two, with wheels four times as tall as Coyote's car, roll off down the curving road.

"All right," Coyote said, cheering up again. "They'll use their solar panel power to process their own peroxide explosives, and their own fuel as well, and go at it slow and steady until maybe they hit something hot. We just may have started a volcano!"

"Is that good?"

Coyote laughed wildly. "I don't know! But no one's ever *done* it before, so it has that at least to recommend it."

They returned to their scheduled travel, among sanctuaries both hidden and open, and Coyote went around saying "We started up Rayleigh mohole last week, have you seen a volcano yet?"

No one had seen it. Rayleigh seemed to be behaving much as before, its thermal plume undisturbed. "Well, maybe it didn't work," Coyote would say. "Maybe it will take some time. On the other hand if that mohole was now floored with molten lava, how would you be able to tell?"

"We could tell," people said. And some added: "Why would you do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something as stupid as that? You might as well call up the Transitional Authority and tell them to come down here to look for us."

So Coyote stopped bringing it up. They rolled on from sanctuary to sanctuary: Mauss Hyde, Gramsci, Overhangs, Christianopolis. . . . At each stop Nirgal was made welcome, and often people knew of him in advance, by reputation. Nirgal was very surprised by the variety and number of sanctuaries, forming together their strange world, half secret and half exposed. And if this world was only a small part of Martian civilization as a whole, what must the surface cities of the north be like? It was beyond his grasp—although it did seem to him that as the marvels of the journey continued, one after the next, his grasp was getting a bit larger. You couldn't just explode from amazement, after all.

"Well," Coyote would say as they drove (he had taught Nirgal how), "we may have started a volcano and we may not have. But it was a new idea in any case. That's one of the greatest things about this, boy, this whole Martian project. It's all *new*."

They headed south again, until the ghostly wall of the polar cap loomed over the horizon. Soon they would be home again.

Nirgal thought of all the sanctuaries they had visited. "Do you really think we'll have to hide forever, Desmond?"

"Desmond? Desmond? Who's this *Desmond?*" Coyote blew out his lips. "Oh, boy, I don't know. No one can know for sure. The people hiding out here were shoved out at a strange time, when their way of life was threatened, and I'm not so sure it's that way anymore in the surface cities they're building in the north. The bosses on Earth learned their lesson, maybe, and people up there are more comfortable. Or maybe it's just that the elevator hasn't been replaced yet."

"So there might not be another revolution?"

"I don't know."

"Or not until there's another space elevator?"

"I don't know! But the elevator's coming, and they're building some big new mirrors out there, you can see them shining at night sometimes, or right around the sun. So anything might happen, I guess. But revolution is a rare thing. And a lot of them are reactionary anyway. Peasants have their tradition, you see, the values and habits that allow them to get by. But they live so close to the edge that rapid change can push them over it, and in those times it's not politics, but survival. I saw that myself when I was your age. Now the people sent here were not poor, but they did have their own tradition, and like the poor they were powerless. And when the influx of the 2050s hit, their tradition was wiped out. So they fought for what they had. And the truth is, they lost. You can't fight the powers that be anymore, especially here, because the weapons are too strong and our shelters are too fragile. We'd have to arm ourselves pretty good, or something. So, you know. We're hiding, and they're flooding Mars with a new kind of crowd, people who were used to really tough conditions on Earth, so that things here don't strike them so bad. They get the treatment and they're happy. We're not seeing so many people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trying to get out into the sanctuaries, like we did in the years before '61. There's some, but not many. As long as people have their entertainments, their own little tradition, you know, they aren't going to lift a finger."

"But . . . " Nirgal said, and faltered.

Coyote saw the expression on his face and laughed. "Hey, who knows? Pretty soon now they'll have another elevator in place up on Pavonis Mons, and then very likely they'll start to screw things up all over again, those greedy bastards. And you young folks, maybe you won't want Earth calling the shots here. We'll see when the time comes. Meanwhile we're having fun, right? We're keeping the flame."

That night Coyote stopped the car, and told Nirgal to suit up. They went out and stood on the sand, and Coyote turned him around so that he was facing north. "Look at the sky."

Nirgal stood and watched; and saw a new star burst into existence, there over the northern horizon, growing in a matter of seconds to a long white-tailed comet, flying west to east. When it was about halfway across the sky the blazing head of the comet burst apart, and bright fragments scattered in every direction, white into black.

"One of the ice asteroids!" Nirgal exclaimed.

Coyote snorted. "There's no surprising you, is there boy! Well, I'll tell you something you didn't know; that was ice asteroid 2089 C, and did you see how it blew up there at the end? That was a first. They did that on purpose. Blowing them up when they enter the atmosphere allows them to use bigger asteroids without endangering the surface. And that was my idea! I told them to do that myself, I put an anonymous suggestion in the AI at Greg's Place when I was in there messing with their comm system, and they jumped on it. They're going to do them that way all the time now. There'll be one or two every season like that, they're thickening the atmosphere pretty fast. Look at how the stars are trembling. They used to do that all the nights of Earth. Ah, boy. . . . It'll happen here all the time too, someday. Air you can breathe like a bird in the sky. Maybe that will help us to change the order of things on this world. You can never tell about things like that."

Nirgal closed his eyes, and saw red afterimages of the ice meteor score his eyelids. Meteors like white fireworks, holes boring straight into the mantle, volcanoes. . . . He turned and saw the Coyote hopping over the plain, small and thin, his helmet strangely large on him as if he were a mutant or a shaman wearing a sacred animal head, doing a changeling dance over the sand. This was the Coyote, no doubt about it. His father!

Then they had circumnavigated the world, albeit high in the southern hemisphere. The polar cap rose over the horizon and grew, until they were under the overhang of ice, which did not seem as tall as it had at the start of the journey. They circled the ice to home, and drove into the hangar, and got out of the little boulder car that had become so well-known to Nirgal in the previous two weeks, and walked stiffly through

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the locks and back down the long tunnel into the dome, and suddenly they were among all the familiar faces, being hugged and cossetted and questioned. Nirgal shrank shyly from the attention, but there was no need, Coyote told all their stories for him, and he only had to laugh, and deny responsibility for what they had done. Glancing past his kin, he saw how small his little world really was; the dome was less than five kilometers across, and 250 meters high out over the lake. A small world.

When the homecoming was over he walked out in the early morning glow, feeling the happy nip of the air and looking closely at the buildings and bamboo stands of the village, in its nest of hills and trees. It all looked so strange and small. Then he was out on the dunes and walking out to Hiroko's place, with the gulls wheeling overhead, and he stopped frequently just to see things. He breathed in the chill kelp-and-salt scent of the beach; the intense familiarity of the scent triggered a million memories at once, and he knew he was home.

5.

But home had changed. Or he had. Between the attempt to save Simon and the trip with Coyote, he had become a youth apart from the rest; the distinguishing adventures that he had so longed for had come, and their only result was to exile him from his friends. Jackie and Dao hung together tighter than ever, and acted like a shield between him and all the younger sansei. Quickly Nirgal realized that he hadn't really wanted to be different after all. He only wanted to melt back into the closeness of his little pack, and be one with his siblings.

But when he came among them they went silent, and Dao would lead them off, after the most awkward encounters imaginable. And he was left to return to the adults, who began to keep him with them in the afternoons, as a matter of course. Perhaps they meant to spare him more of his pack's hard treatment, but it only had the effect of marking him even more. There was no cure for it. One day, walking the beach unhappily in the gray and pewter twilight of a fall afternoon, it occurred to him that his childhood was gone. That was what this feeling was; he was something else now, neither adult nor child, a solitary being, a foreigner in his own country. The melancholy realization had a peculiar pleasure to it.

One day after lunch Jackie stayed behind with him and Hiroko, who had come in for the day to teach, and demanded to be included in her afternoon lesson. "Why should you teach him and not me?"

"No reason," Hiroko said impassively. "Stay if you want. Get out your lectern and call up Thermal Engineering, page one oh five oh. We'll model Zygote Dome for example. Tell me what is the warmest point under the dome?"

Nirgal and Jackie attacked the problem, competing and yet side by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side. He was so happy she was there that he could hardly remember the problem, and Jackie raised a finger before he had even organized his thinking about it. And she laughed at him, a bit scornful but also pleased. Through all these enormous changes in them both there remained in Jackie that capacity for infectious joy, that laughter from which it was so painful to be exiled. . . .

"Here is a question for next time," Hiroko said to them. "All the names for Mars in the areophany are names given to it by Terrans. About half of them mean *fire star* in the languages they come from, but that is still a name from the outside. The question is, what is Mars's own name for itself?"

Several weeks later Coyote came through again, which made Nirgal both happy and nervous. Coyote took a morning teaching the children, but fortunately he treated Nirgal the same as all the rest. "Earth is in very bad shape," he told them as they worked on vaccuum pumps from the liquid sodium tanks in the Rickover, "and it will only get worse. That makes their control over Mars all the more dangerous to us. We'll have to hide until we can cut ourselves free of them entirely, and then stand safe to the side while they descend into madness and chaos. You remember my words here, this is a prophecy as true as truth."

"That isn't what John Boone said," Jackie declared. She spent many of her evening hours exploring John Boone's AI, and now she pulled out the box from her thigh pocket, and with only the briefest search for a passage, the friendly voice from the box was saying, "Mars will never be truly safe until Earth is too."

Coyote laughed raucously. "Yes, well, John Boone was like that, wasn't he. But you note he is dead, while I'm still here."

"Anyone can hide," Jackie said sharply. "But John Boone got out there and led. That's why I'm a Boonean."

"You're a Boone *and* a Boonean!" Coyote exclaimed, teasing her. "And Boonean algebra never did add up. But look here, girl, you have to understand your grandfather better than that if you want to call yourself a Boonean. You can't make John Boone into any kind of dogma and be true to what he was. I see other so-called Booneans out there doing just that, and it makes me laugh when it doesn't make me foam at the mouth. Why if John Boone were to meet you and talk to you for even just an hour, then at the end of that time he would be a Jackie-ist. And if he met Dao and talked to him, then he would become a Daoist, maybe even a Maoist. That's just the way he was. And that was *good*, you see, because what it did was put the responsibility for thinking back onto us. It forced us to make a contribution, because without that Boone couldn't operate. His point was not just that everyone can do it, but that everyone *should* do it."

"Including all the people on Earth," Jackie replied.

"Not another quick one!" Coyote cried. "Oh you girl, why don't you leave these boys of yours and marry me now, I got a kiss like this vacuum

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pump, here, come on," and he waved the pump at her and Jackie knocked it aside and shoved him back and ran, just for the fun of the chase. She was now the fastest runner in Zygote bar none, even Nirgal with all his endurance could not sprint the way she did, and the kids laughed at Coyote as he skipped after her; he was pretty swift himself for an ancient, and he turned and jinked and went after them all, growling and ending up at the bottom of a pile-on, crying "Oh my leg, oh I'm going to get you for that, you boys are just jealous of me because I'm going to steal your girl away, oh! Stop! Oh!"

This kind of teasing made Nirgal uncomfortable, and Hiroko didn't like it either. She told Coyote to stop, but he just laughed at her. "You're the one that's gone and made yourself a little incest camp," he said. "What are you going to do, neuter them?" He laughed at Hiroko's dark expression. "You're going to have to farm them out soon, that's what you're going to have to do. And I might as well get some of them."

Hiroko dismissed him, and soon after that he was off on a trip again. And the next time Hiroko taught, she took all the kids to the bathhouse and they got in the bath after her and sat on the slick tiles in the shallow end, soaking in the hot steamy water while Hiroko spoke. Nirgal sat next to Jackie's long-limbed naked body which he knew so well, including all its dramatic changes of the past year, and he found that he was unable to look at her.

His ancient naked mother said, "You know how genetics works, I've taught you that myself. And you know that many of you are half brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces and cousins and so forth. I am mother or grandmother to many of you, and so you should not mate and have children together. It's as simple as that, a very simple genetic law." She held up a palm, as if to say, This is our shared body.

"But all living things are filled with viriditas," she went on, "the green force, patterning outward. And so it is normal that you will love each other, especially now that your bodies are blooming. There is nothing wrong with that, no matter what Coyote says. He is only joking in any case. And in one thing he is right; you will soon be meeting many other people your age, and they will eventually become mates and partners and co-parents with you, closer to you even than your tribe kin, whom you know too well to ever love as an other. We here are all pieces of your self; and true love is always for the other."

Nirgal kept his eyes on his mother's, his gaze blank. Still he knew exactly when Jackie had brought her legs together, he had felt the minute change in temperature in the water swirling between them. And it seemed to him that his mother was wrong in some of what she had said. Although he knew Jackie's body so well, she was still in most ways as distant as any fiery star, bright and imperious in the sky. She was the queen of their little band, and could crush him with a glance if she cared to, and did fairly often even though he had been studying her moods all his life. That was as much otherness as he cared to handle. And he loved her, he knew he did. But she didn't love him back, not in the same way.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nor did she love Dao in that way, he thought, at least not anymore; which was a small comfort. It was Peter she watched in the way that he watched her. But Peter was away most of the time. So she loved no one in Zygote the way Nirgal loved her. Perhaps for her it was already as Hiroko had said, and Dao and Nirgal and the rest were simply too well known. Her brothers and sisters, no matter the genes involved.

Then one day the sky fell in earnest. The whole highest part of the water ice sheet cracked away from the CO_2, collapsing through the mesh and into the lake and all over the beach and the surrounding dunes. Luckily it happened in the early morning when no one was down there, but in the village the first booms and cracks were explosively loud, and everyone rushed to their windows and saw most of the fall: the giant white sections of ice dropping like bombs or spinning down like skipped plates, and then the whole surface of the lake exploding and spilling out over the dunes. People came charging out of their rooms, and in the noise and panic Hiroko and Maya herded the kids into the school, which had a discrete air system. When a few minutes had passed and it appeared that the dome itself was going to hold, Peter and Michel and Nadia ran off through the debris, dodging and jumping over the shattered white plates, around the lake to the Rickover to make sure it was all right. If it weren't it would be a deadly mission for the three of them, and mortal danger to everyone else. From the school window Nirgal could see the far shore of the lake, which was cluttered with icebergs. The air was aswirl with screaming gulls. The three figures twisted along the narrow high path just under the edge of the dome, and disappeared into the Rickover. Jackie chewed her knuckles in fear. Soon they phoned back a report: all was well. The ice over the reactor was supported by a particularly close-meshed framework, and it had held.

So they were safe, for the moment. But over the next couple of days, spent in the village in an unhappy state of tension, an investigation into the cause of the fall revealed that the whole mass of dry ice over them had sagged ever so slightly, cracking the layer of water ice and sending it down through the mesh. Sublimation on the surface of the cap was apparently speeding up to a remarkable degree, as the atmosphere thickened and the world warmed.

During the next week the icebergs in the lake slowly melted, but the plates scattered over the dunes were still there, melting ever so slowly. The youngsters weren't allowed on the beach anymore; it wasn't clear how stable the remainder of the ice layer was.

The tenth night after the collapse they had a village meeting in the dining hall, all two hundred of them. Nirgal looked around at them, at his little tribe; the sansei looked frightened, the nisei defiant, the issei stunned. The old ones had lived in Zygote for fourteen Martian years, and no doubt it was hard for them to remember any other life; impossible for the children, who had never known anything else.

It did not need saying that they would not surrender themselves to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surface world. And yet the dome was becoming untenable, and they were too large a group to impose themselves on any of the other hidden sanctuaries. Splitting up would solve that problem, but it wasn't a happy solution.

It took an hour's talk to lay all this out. "We could try Vishniac," Michel said. "It's big, and they'd welcome us."

But it was the Bogdanovists' home, not theirs. This was the message on the faces of the old ones. Suddenly it seemed to Nirgal that they were the most frightened of all.

He said, "You could move back farther under the ice."

Everyone stared at him.

"Melt a new dome, you mean," Hiroko said.

Nirgal shrugged. Having said it, he realized he disliked the idea.

But Nadia said, "The cap is thicker back there. It will be a long time before it sublimes enough to trouble us. By that time everything will have changed."

There was a silence, and then Hiroko said, "It's a good idea. We can hold on here while a new dome is being melted, and move things over as space becomes available. It should only take a few months."

"*Shikata ga nai*," Maya said sardonically. *There is no other choice.* Of course there were other choices. But she looked pleased at the prospect of a big new project, and so did Nadia. And the rest of them looked relieved that they had an option which kept them together, and hidden. The issei, Nirgal saw suddenly, were very frightened of exposure. He sat back, wondering at that, thinking of the open cities he had visited with Coyote.

They used steam hoses powered by the Rickover to melt another tunnel to the hangar, and then a long tunnel under the cap, until the ice above was three-hundred meters deep. Back there they began subliming a new round domed cavern, and digging a shallow lakebed for a new lake. Most of the CO_2 gas was captured, refrigerated to the outside temperature, and released; the rest was broken down into oxygen and carbon, and stored for use.

While the excavation went on they dug up the shallow runner roots of the big snow bamboos, and cantilevered them out of the ground and hauled them on their largest truck down the tunnel to the new cave, scraping leaves all the way. They disassembled the village's buildings, and relocated them. The robot bulldozer and trucks ran all hours of the day and night, scooping up the battered sand of the old dunes and carting it back down into the new cave; there was too much biomass in it (including Simon) to leave behind. In essence they were taking everything inside the shell of Zygote dome along with them. When they were done, the old cave was nothing but an empty bubble at the bottom of the polar cap, sandy ice above, icy sand below, the air in it nothing but the ambient Martian atmosphere, 170 millibars of mostly CO_2 gas, at 240 degrees Kelvin. Thin poison.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One day Nirgal went back with Peter to take a look at the old place. It was shocking to see the only home he had ever had, reduced to such a shell—the ice all cracked above, the sand all torn up, the raw root holes of the village gaping like horrible wounds, the lakebed scraped clear even of its algae. It looked small and ramshackle, some desperate animal's den. Moles in a hole, Coyote had said. Hiding from vultures. "Let's get out of here," Peter said sadly, and they walked together down the long bare poorly lit tunnel to the new dome, stepping along the concrete road Nadia had built, now all ratcheted with treadmarks.

They laid out the new dome in a new pattern, with the village away from the tunnel lock, near an escape tunnel that ran far under the ice, to an exit in upper Chasma Australe. The greenhouses were set nearer the perimeter lights, and the dune crests were higher than before, and the weather equipment was set right next to the Rickover. There were any number of small improvements of that sort, which kept it from being a replica of their old home. And every day they were so busy with the work of constructing it that there was no time to think much about the change; morning classes in the schoolhouse had been canceled since the fall, and now the kids were merely a rotating work crew, assigned to whoever needed help the most on that particular day. Sometimes the adult overseeing them would try to make their work into a lesson—Hiroko and Nadia were especially good at this—but they had little time to spare, and only added an explanatory sentence to instructions that were too simple to need explanation in any case: tightening wall modules with allen wrenches, carrying around planters and algae jars in the greenhouses, and so on. It was just work—they were part of the work force, which was too small for the task even so, despite the versatile robots that looked like rovers stripped of their exteriors. And running around, doing the work, Nirgal was for the most part happy.

But once as he left the schoolhouse and saw the dining hall, rather than the big shoots of Creche Crescent, the sight brought him up short. His old familiar world was gone, gone forever. That was how time worked. It sent a pang through him that brought tears to his eyes, and he spent the rest of that day somewhat stunned and distant, as if always a step or two behind himself, watching everything that happened drained of emotion, detached as he had been after Simon's death, exiled to the white world one step outside the green. There was nothing to indicate that he would ever come out of such a melancholy state, and how could he know if he ever would? All those days of his childhood were gone, along with Zygote itself, and they would never come back, and this day too would pass and disappear, this dome too slowly sublime away and crash in on itself. Nothing would last. So what was the point? For hours at a time this question plagued him, taking the taste and color out of everything, and when Hiroko noticed how subdued he was, and asked him what was wrong, he simply asked her outright. There was that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

advantage to Hiroko; you could ask her anything, including the fundamental questions. "Why do we do all this, Hiroko? When it all goes white no matter what?"

She stared at him, birdlike, her head cocked to one side. He thought he could see her affection for him in that cock of the head, but he wasn't sure; as he got older he felt he understood her (along with everyone else) less and less.

She said, "It is sad the old dome is gone, isn't it? But we must focus on what is coming. This too is viriditas. To concentrate not on what we have created, but what we will create. The dome was like a flower which wilts and falls, but contains the seed of a new plant, which grows and then there are new flowers and new seeds. The past is gone. Thinking about it will only make you melancholy. Why, I was a girl in Japan once, on Hokkaido Island! Yes, as young as you! And I can't tell you how far gone that is. But here we are now, you and me, surrounded by these plants and these people, and if you pay attention to them, and how you can make them increase and prosper, then the life comes back into things. You feel the *kami* inside all things, and that is all you need. This moment itself is all we ever live in."

"And the old days?"

She laughed at that. "You're growing up. Well, you must remember the old days from time to time. They were good ones, weren't they? You had a happy childhood, that is a blessing. But so will *these* days be good. Take this moment right here, and ask yourself, What now is lacking? Hmmm? . . . Coyote says that he wants you and Peter to go along with him on another trip. Maybe you should go and get out under the sky again, what do you say?"

So preparations for another trip with Coyote were made, and they continued to work on the new Zygote, informally rechristened Gamete. At night in the relocated dining hall the adults talked for a long time about their situation. Sax and Vlad and Ursula, among others, wanted back into the surface world. They couldn't do their real work properly in the hidden sanctuaries, they wanted back into the full flood of medical science, terraforming, construction. "We'll never be able to disguise ourselves," Hiroko said. "No one can change their genomes."

"It's not our genomes we should change, but the records," Sax said. "That's what Spencer has done. He's gotten his physical characteristics into a new record identity."

"And we did cosmetic surgery on his face," Vlad said.

"Yes, but it was minimal because of our age, right? We none of us look the same. Anyway, if you do something like what he did, we could take on new identities."

Maya said, "Did Spencer really get into *all* the records?"

Sax shrugged. "He was left behind in Cairo, and had the chance to get into some of the ones being used now for security purposes. That has been enough. I'd like to try something similar. Let's see what Coyote

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

says about it. He's not in any records at all, so he must know how he did it."

"He's been hidden from the beginning," Hiroko said. "That's different."

"Yes, but he might have some ideas."

"We could just move into the demimonde," Nadia point out, "and stay off the records entirely. I think I'd like to try that."

Maya nodded.

By day Gamete was slowly completed. But it never seemed right to Nirgal, no matter how much he tried to focus on the making of it. It wasn't his place.

News came from another traveler that Coyote would be by soon. Nirgal felt his pulse quicken; to get back under the starry sky again, wandering by night in Coyote's boulder car, from sanctuary to sanctuary. . . .

Jackie stared at him attentively as he talked about it to her. And that afternoon, after they were dismissed from the day's work, she led him down to the tall new dunes and kissed him. When he recovered his wits he kissed back, and then they were kissing passionately, hugging each other hard and steaming all over each other's faces. They knelt in the trough between two high dunes, under a pale thin fog, and then lay together in a cocoon made of their down coats, and kissed and touched each other, peeling down each other's pants and creating a little envelope of their own warmth, huffing out steam and crackling the frost on the sand underneath their coats. All this without a word, merging in one great hot electric circuit, in defiance of Hiroko and all the world. So this is what it feels like, Nirgal thought. Under the strands of Jackie's black hair grains of sand gleamed like jewels, as if minute ice flowers were contained within them. Glories inside every thing.

When they were done they crawled up to glance over the dune crest, to make sure no one was coming their way, and then returned to their nest and pulled their clothes over them, for the warmth. They huddled together, kissing voluptuously and without haste. And Jackie prodded him in the chest with a finger and said, "Now we belong to each other."

Nirgal could only nod happily and kiss the long expanse of her throat, his face buried in her black hair. "Now you belong to me," she said.

He sincerely hoped it was true. It was how he had wanted it, for as long as he could remember.

But that evening in the bathhouse Jackie sloshed across the pool, and caught up Dao and gave him a hug, body to body. She pulled back and stared at Nirgal with a blank expression, her dark eyes like holes in her face. Nirgal sat frozen in the shallows, feeling his torso stiffen as if preparing for a blow. His balls were still sore from coming in her; and there she stood draped against Dao, as she hadn't been in months, staring at him with a basilisk stare.

The strangest sensation swept over him—he understood that this was a moment he would remember all his life, a pivotal moment, right there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the steamy comfortable bath, under the osprey eye of the statuesque Maya, whom Jackie hated with a fine hate, who was now watching the three of them closely, suspecting something. So this was how it was. Jackie and Nirgal might belong to each other, and he certainly belonged to her—but her idea of belonging was not his. The shock of this knocked his breath out, it was a kind of collapse of the roof of his understanding of things. He looked at her, stunned, hurt, becoming angry—she hugged Dao all the more—and he understood. She had collected both of them. Yes, it made sense, it was certain; and Reull and Steve and Frantz were all equally devoted to her—perhaps that was just a holdover from her rule over the little band, but perhaps not. Perhaps she had collected all of them. And clearly, now that Nirgal was a kind of foreigner to them, she was more comfortable with Dao. So he was an exile in his own home, and in his own love's heart. If she had a heart!

He didn't know if any of these impressions were true, didn't know how to find out. He wasn't sure he wanted to find out. He got out of the bath and retreated into the men's room, feeling Jackie's gaze boring into his back, and Maya's too.

In the men's room he caught sight of an unfamiliar face in one of the mirrors. He stopped short and recognized it as his own face, twisted with distress.

He approached the mirror slowly, feeling the strange sensation of momentousness sweep through him again. He stared at the face in the mirror, stared and stared; it came to him that he was not the center of the universe, nor its only consciousness, but a person like all the rest, seen from the outside by others, the way he saw others when he looked at them. And this strange Nirgal-in-the-mirror was an arresting black-haired brown-eyed boy, intense and compelling, a near twin to Jackie, with thick black eyebrows and a . . . a *look*. He didn't want to know any of this. But he felt the power burning at his fingertips, and recalled how people looked at him, and understood that for Jackie he might represent the same sort of dangerous power that she did for him—which would explain her consorting with Dao, as an attempt to hold him off, to hold a balance, to assert her power. To show they were a matched pair—and a match. And all of a sudden the tension left his torso, and he shuddered, and then grinned, lopsidedly. They did indeed belong to each other. But he was still himself.

So when Coyote showed up and came by to ask Nirgal to join him on another trip, he agreed instantly, very thankful for the opportunity. The flash of anger on Jackie's face when she heard the news was painful to see; but another part of him exulted at his otherness, at his ability to escape her, or at least to get some distance. Match or not, he needed it.

A few evenings later he and Coyote and Peter and Michel drove away from the huge mass of the polar cap, into the broken land, black under its blanket of stars.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nirgal looked back at the luminous white cliff with a tumultuous mix of feelings; but chief among them was relief. Back there they would burrow ever deeper under the ice, it seemed, until they lived in a dome under the South Pole—while the red world spun through the cosmos, wild among the stars. Suddenly he understood that he would never again live under the dome, never return to it except for short visits; this was not a matter of choice, but simply the way it was going to happen. His fate, or destiny. He could feel it like a red rock in his hand. Henceforth he would be homeless, unless it be that the whole planet someday became his home, every crater and canyon known to him, every plant, every rock, every person—everything, in the green world and the white. But that was a task to occupy many lives.

He would have to start learning. ●

WE ARE WHAT WE EAT
to Jack Horner

Dinosaurs did not eat grass,
(It had not evolved.)
They feasted on evergreens, tree ferns, and flowers
Lacking the humble endurance of grass,
they became sexually competitive
when the inland sea widened
and the Late Cretaceous got crowded,
a flowering of personal ornamentation—
Ming dynesty fans, Roman helmets,
Elizabethan frills and ruffs,
more thingamajigs and doodads
than a Victorian parlor,
a frenzy of specialization
more rife than modern medicine
Dinosaurs did not eat grass.
They feasted on palm fronds,
gingko, magnolia, and dogwood.
Lacking the humble endurance of grass,
when winter came, they died.

—Sandra Lindow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Marketplace

IA FEBRUARY '94

ASIMOV'S/ANALOG combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is $4.80 per word—payable in advance—($72.00 minimum). Capitalized words 60¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 1540 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10168-0035.

ART AND DESIGN

ART PRINTS AND POSTERS BY KEITH PARKINSON. For information on prints by Parkinson and other artists, contact SHADOW GRAPHICS, P.O. Box 199, Lititz, PA 17543.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265.

AMBERZINE! Authorized journal of Roger Zelazny's Amber. Write: Phage Press Aaz., Box 519, Detroit, MI 48231-0519.

CATALOGS AND DIRECTORIES

Plastic model kits of science fiction and the unusual. Free catalog, John Green, 1821 West Jacaranda, Fullerton, CA 92633. (714) 526-5467.

PERSONAL

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! All ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE INTRODUCTIONS, (Dept. 123), Suite 2, 24, Cecil Square, Margate, Kent, CT9 1BA, ENGLAND. TEL: 01144-843-290735.

JAPANESE, Asians, Europeans seek friendship, correspondence! All ages! Free information: Inter-Pacific, Box 304-C, Birmingham, Michigan 48012.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

Beautiful asian women! Penpals, romance! Free color brochure. P.I.C., Box: 461873DB, Los Angeles, CA 90046, 213-650-1994.

Would you like to be one of

THE HAPPY FEW™?

Are you young (18-40) and college-educated? Are you seriously searching for love? We offer self-descriptive essays written by people who are, like you, looking for true love and companionship. You decide whom to contact.

THE HAPPY FEW is a confidential and intelligent way to discover your perfect love. *For details, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:* Dept. SF, Box 382805, Cambridge, MA 02238. (Also open to gays.)

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, Combo #3

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to Judy Dorman
Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The Winter schedule has filled out since last issue's press time. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, a sample of SF folksongs, and information about clubs and fanzines, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. The hot line is (703) 2SF-DAYS (273-3297). If a machine answers (with a list of the week's cons), leave a message and I'll call back on my nickel. When writing cons, send an SASE. For free listings, tell me of your con 6 months ahead. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre, with a music keyboard.

JANUARY 1994

7-9—**TropiCon.** For info, write: **Box 70143, Ft. Lauderdale FL 33307.** Or phone: **(305) 385-4111** (10 A.M. to 10 P.M., not collect). Con will be held in: Palm Beach FL (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Airport Hilton. Guests will include: Judith Tarr, Ben Bova, Hal Clement, Gary Roen.

7-9—**MusiCon. (615) 889-5951 or (708) 394-3340.** Shoney's Inn, Nashville TN. SF folksinging con.

14-16—**Dawson's Con. (415) 324-9124.** San Francisco Bay area. Poul Anderson, hacker Cliff Stoll.

14-16—**RustyCon. (206) 367-1150.** Seattle WA. Artist Bob Eggleton, fans John and Bjo Trimble.

14-16—**RuneQuestCon. (212) 472-7752.** Columbia MD. For fans of the RuneQuest role play game.

21-23—**Arisia, 1 Kendall Sq. #322, Cambridge MA 02139.** Park Plaza Hotel, Boston MA, Robinsons.

21-23—**ConFusion, Box 8284, Ann Arbor MI 48107, (313) 429-3475.** Holiday Inn, Romulus MI. Vinge.

21-23—**ConFurence, Box 1958, Garden Grove CA 92642. (714) 530-1312.** Airporter, Irvine CA. Furry.

28-30—**VulKon, 12237 SW 50th, Cooper City FL 33330. (305) 434-6060.** St. Petersburg FL. Trek.

FEBRUARY 1994

4-6—**VulKon, 12237 SW 50th, Cooper City FL 33330. (305) 434-6060.** Dallas TX. Commercial Trek con.

4-6—**VibraPhone, % 2 Duncan Gate, London Road, Bromley BR1 3SG, UK.** Brighton. SF folksinging.

10-13—**PrezCon, Box 2153, Charlottesville VA 22903. (804) 823-7433.** Historical wargaming meet.

11-13—**Potlatch, Box 31848, Seattle WA 98103. (206) 634-3828.** Old-style fannish relax-a-con.

18-20—**Boskone, Box 809, Framingham MA 01701. (617) 625-2311.** Sheraton Tara. Shetterly, Bull.

18-21—**CostumeCon, 223 Addison, San Francisco CA 94131.** SF, fantasy and historical costuming.

SEPTEMBER 1994

1-5—**ConAdian, Box 2430, Winnipeg MB R3C 4A7. (204) 942-3427.** WorldCon. $85/C$95 to 9/30/93.

AUGUST 1995

24-28—**Intersection, Box 15430, Washington DC 20003.** Glasgow UK. WorldCon. US$85 to 9/30/93.

AUGUST 1996

29-Sep. 2—**LA Con III, % SCIFI, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.** WorldCon. Join now for $75.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ATTENTION

SCIENCE FICTION FANS!

Now, for a limited time only, you can purchase these exciting, high quality Analog and/or Asimov's T-shirts. For only $15.95 you can receive your choice of T-shirt with either the Analog cover or the Asimov's cover. Or take two T-shirts, any combination, for only $25.00. That's a savings of over 21%! But don't delay—our quantities are limited and are going fast!

TO GET IN ON THIS TERIFFIC OFFER JUST SEND YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO

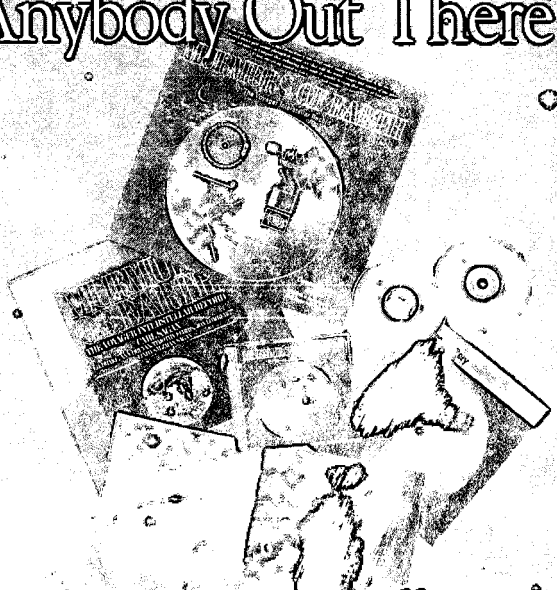
Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. One size fits all.

DELL MAGAZINES
P.O. BOX 40
VERNON, N.J. 07462

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

M8TS-2

Hello? Is There Anybody Out There?



Let us present o calling card.

In 1977 the *Voyager* spacecraft set out on a one-way trip to explore the cosmos. Since its launch, it has explored dozens of new worlds and billions of miles of space. By the year 2020, its radio transmitter will stop functioning, and it will wander silently forever in the realm of the stars.

Will intelligent life forms someday encounter *Voyager*. What will they think of its creators? What message are we sending them? *Murmurs of the Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record* brings to Earth, after nearly 16 years, the actual recordings and pictures entrusted to *Voyager*.

- the music and sounds of Earth with the greetings of its people
- a double CD package that can be played on any CD player
- 260-page companion book describing the content and origins of the Interstellar Record
- special 16-page gallery of images transmitted by *Voyager* back to Earth

Now, through the technology of CD-ROM, you can experience the complete audio recordings and human-built photographs *Voyager* will take with it to the stars for all time. The story of one of a kind collector's item, a time of our world to last forever.

To share the experience, visit your local software retailer, or call (800) 432-3766.

LICENSED TO UNICORE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED